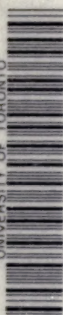


# *Green Cliffs*

A NOVEL

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



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*Rowland Grey*

Frances J Glass 1913



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GREEN CLIFFS





# GREEN CLIFFS

A SUMMER LOVE STORY

BY

ROWLAND GREY

AUTHOR OF "MYSELF WHEN YOUNG," "THE UNEXPECTED"  
ETC.

London : HUTCHINSON & CO.  
Paternoster Row  1905

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TO  
ALL MY FRENCH FRIENDS  
KNOWN AND UNKNOWN  
AND TO THE MEMORY OF  
"VICTOR DE VERTON"





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# GREEN CLIFFS

## CHAPTER I

### GEORGE EVERARD STOKES

**T**WO very distinct personalities, wearing the same simple dress of heliotrope muslin with a certain air that gave distinction to its simplicity, sat at a writing-table in a small Chelsea flat. In winter its dainty arrangement might have made it attractive almost by reason of its very limited proportions, but on this burning July morning it was close instead of cosy, despite open windows screened with ivy-leaved geraniums, and a big, cool bunch of great ox-eye daisies—one of the flowers which never look hot, and cheerfully endure imprisonment without drooping pathetically.

Miranda Ricordan, twenty-nine, with glorious waving hair only the envious called red, with grey eyes with a sparkle in their depths like a

tricksy imp trying to escape, but held in bondage by judicious restraint until occasion fit, was at that moment one of the happiest people in London, and quite ready to admit it at a time when to allow that we are happy at all is to be just a trifle out of date.

But her other self, "George Everard Stokes," was less contented, although the pen went scratching on as quickly as if the mind of the writer was not perversely wandering in every direction except that of the subject of the article due within an hour or two. It was finished at last, and Miranda flung down her pen with a relief that was almost a new sensation. She loved her work, and until this morning had sent her cheerful columns to the *Morning Star* with a daily thanksgiving that now, at last, she had plenty to do—so much that it seemed almost possible that she would soon be able to save enough to give it all up for six months and write that wonderful novel she was so sure she had within her brain.

There should be nothing crude or unripe about it, she had long ago decided, nothing hurried or amateurish ; it should be dramatic yet natural, exciting without being spasmodic, witty without sham epigram. There was to be absolutely no end to the qualities of that amazing book, for

every time Miranda read a good novel—and she knew the difference wisely—she secretly settled that the admired quality in it should be in hers also. There is no time so sweet in a writer's career as that when the writer has not learnt the meaning of limitations. A fortunate few never discover them at all, and Miranda, still in search of the plot and subject of her great romance, was in full enjoyment of a faith in her own alert talent which, if she had only known it, was much more delightful than fame, even as the rose-coloured wonder she was still fresh enough to conceive it. Moreover, she was not artist enough to "claim the artist's sorrow," or, indeed, to comprehend that it was in the least necessary. And upon this sunny morning, when there was sufficient hay down in the country to sweeten even the air of Chelsea by just an occasional suggestion of its opulent fragrance, the woman in her quite predominated over the eminent novelist of the future, with a joyous sense of youth and hope and pleasure.

"Good-bye, Mr. George Everard Stokes," she said to herself. "You and I shall not meet for six weeks, and later on you will, no doubt, quite forget anybody but your splendid self and your second editions. What a funny conglomeration



of ideas made you, after all ! George—well, because George is a sort of superstition among writing women ; as if there could be two Eliots or two Sands. Everard for my poor dear father ; and Stokes because of funny old Devon Stokes, so faithful and so miserable when we lived at Fontainebleau. Well ! the next thing is to tell Francine, and to hope that the poor dear will not quite go out of her mind with rapture. You shall go too, Dick, my precious," she said aloud, as a little Scotch terrier ran to her with damp caresses and eyes eager with hope that this ridiculous sitting still was really over, and something sensible upon the near horizon.

"Francine !" The call was answered by the stout, clean wearer of a spotless Brittany cap and the owner of a frank pair of blue Breton eyes, set in a face as rosy as a Dinan cider apple. She had a market basket on her substantial arm, and wore the expression indicating clearly to her intimates that her daily battle with the Chelsea tradesmen had resulted in victory, despite her imperfect command of the language she persisted in regarding as a kind of premeditated insult to herself.

Miranda spoke French with the complete accustomedness only those possess who have been

rocked to sleep to the jolting strains of "Sur le pont d'Avignon," wakened to those of "Trempe ton pain, Marie;" so well, in fact, that in her three years in Rosemary Mansions she had kept Francine, flower of *bonnes à tout faire*—that all-embracing phrase of which "maid-of-all-work" is no sort of translation. Francine could not have existed without a mistress who would listen to her. Talk was as essential to her as food, and to Miranda pretty remembrances floated on that endless stream of words, of a little girl of seven playing housekeeper to her father so merrily in Fontainebleau as to have no regret for the mother she had never known.

"There will, I think, come no more the tough chicken from that brigand Robinson, Mademoiselle," began Francine in comma-less triumph. "I told the truth and compelled his attention. I have with me another. Ah, he gladly made reduction in order to hear no more of the disaster. I told him that my distinguished mistress entertained a millionaire at déjeuner, and, lo! a bird of antiquity, the grandmother of her tribe, upon which the good butter was all wasted. He had shame that all heard in his establishment. And they laughed, *mon Dieu!* even these English, they laughed; and they do it not easily."

"I also have news, Francine," interpolated Miranda quickly, as that voluble lady finally paused for breath. "My uncle Ansell, whom I never knew, is dead, and has left me some money—a hundred and fifty pounds a year."

"What a magnificent fortune! Heaven be thanked, Mademoiselle, that it comes not too late to make you the *dot*. I should have wept to think that you should dress the hair of St. Catherine—you, with such tresses of pure gold."

"You may have to weep still, Francine. I shall not marry myself. I want to keep the *dot* and be amused well. See! I shall leave all this, and go to Brittany for a great holiday, and take you with me. You shall show me St. Briac, and the old mother, and the brothers, and the church—all."

That Francine put down her basket and forgot possibilities and Dick, indicated a climax of emotion for one whose mind was ever concentrated upon the next meal.

"It is too much joy," she began, slowly unfolding a clean handkerchief, and sobbing into it with leisurely enjoyment. "But they will never believe all I shall have to tell of the prices, the riches, the fogs, of England. I shall be called *la menteuse* in St. Briac, yet my conscience will be

calm ! But, Mademoiselle, in the hotel where you lodge I shall be no longer *bonne à tout faire*, but *femme de chambre*. I will make you the coiffure, and watch well your wardrobe, and see that the *blanchisseuse* robs you not, as even in Bretagne itself they rob the stranger. Ah, you will wear crape for this worthy Monsieur who expires so apropos—the saints rest his soul !—and it will become you, with your blonde hair and pale ivory tint. Let but a *couturière* of Dinard make the mourning, and you shall have a *cachet* even there. You will have entirely the air of a pretty young widow—a thing all these Messieurs adore. The pity that Dick should be so black ! I saw once a little dog there upon the Plage who mourned with his mistress. He was all white, *frisé*, and had a *chou* of black crape in his hairs—the charming beast. It was of a *chic* superb.”

Miranda laughed. She had a pleasant laugh, and small, white, even teeth, which redeemed a rather large mouth. “I shall not wear mourning at all. I tell you that I never even saw my good uncle. He lived and died in Australia.”

“Impossible, Mademoiselle. When one inherits, then one mourns. It is the essential.”

“But not in England,” asserted Miranda, taking her usual refuge with Francine confidently.



"Ah, this extraordinary country! How will it be possible to make them of St. Briac comprehend? For they are properly stupid, after all, and have not seen the world. If only I die not first upon those terrible waters where I endured such sufferings!"

"Well, you must arrange it as you will. We shall start in two or three days. Meanwhile, I am going out to Fleet Street on business." She pinned on a hat of mauve muslin as she spoke, and took up a sunshade to match.

"But never in that costume, Mademoiselle!" shrilled Francine in consternation.

Miranda looked just for an instant into an old oval mirror against the wall. "It will not matter to-day, and it is too hot for black. The chicken will make a *fête* for to-morrow, when I may have a visitor more genuine than your famous millionaire. No, Dick, darling. When I come back we will have a walk, and soon I shall do just as you want all day."

Five minutes later Miranda was on the top of an omnibus, lumbering heavily Strand-wards.

"It doesn't signify really about my gown," she reflected. "I believe Mr. Micklethwaite still looks on George Everard Stokes as the young man who might be useful he thought him when

he wrote that letter. He's never met Miranda Ricordan, though he does know her name, and would not take the smallest notice of her if he did. And as for that wretched, overdriven little Mr. Burnside, I think he would hardly turn a hair if the Queen trailed into the sub-editor's room, though he might be grateful to have any female there to sweep up a little of the dust with her skirts. I am not a journalist to-day ! I'm an idler, and I dare say I look it. I have always made the very best of London in August, but I have hated it really, and now I've only to wonder if the seas are as blue as they say, and the rocks as black, and the fun and the gaiety and the colour like the pictures. I have worked rather hard these five years, with only good little snippets of holiday I've made believe full-sized. Now it can be six weeks at seven francs if I wish, not a poor, scrumpy fortnight. And if I can't find a plot for my novel in six weeks I must be extremely stupid."

It was characteristic that, although Miranda fancied she was rejoicing in her new rôle of idler, she had no idea how to fill it. Her active brain was busy with the novel, and not with herself. For one instant she almost wished to be writing "Chapter I." on a sheet of blue-ruled

paper, and speculated whether any outdoor pleasure could surpass that long-anticipated moment.

Beaulieu Street, Fleet Street, is as dingy as all the other narrow precincts where the big printing presses hum at night like Brobdignagian bees. Since the *Morning Star* appealed to the reading public by appearing at a halfpenny instead of its time-honoured penny, its ancient offices have been modernised and enlarged. The workmen had by no means vanished, and though the editor was announced at leisure to see his contributor at once, Miranda had to pick her way cautiously up a steep old oak staircase full of pitfalls in the form of planks, and mantraps in the shape of tools. There was a tapping and hammering in all directions ; but it was fairly quiet behind the double doors.

"Good morning, Miss Stokes. I believe you telephoned you wished to see me. I am quite free," began Micklethwaite ; for it had been agreed between them at their distant first interview that the ugly pseudonym was always to be used.

Micklethwaite, Scot though he was, had yet almost shown the surprise he felt then. "I cannot refrain from saying that you write a very

gentlemanly letter," he had exclaimed. For George Everard Stokes had worked for him some time before they met, and had manifested the really valuable quality of being able to do precisely what he wanted at short notice and on low terms. He had celebrated the new departure of the *Morning Star* with a dinner at his club to those connected with it. "G. Stokes, Esq.," came in person to decline with thanks, and to give a cogent reason for so doing.

For more than a year since, they had had brief conversations at intervals. Miranda, from the first, made the intervals long and the conversations short. She viewed Micklethwaite privately with warm gratitude, as absolutely the first editor who had ever welcomed her work or placed her upon a definite footing. To her he seemed a sort of Providence only to be propitiated by a meek demeanour, and likely to be easily irritated into replacing her if she became tiresome.

Absolutely the only knowledge he had of her private affairs was that she was the daughter of a painter death had interrupted just when he had made one brilliant success. She had been doing the art criticism for some of the minor galleries, and had proudly told him that her father had painted that well-known beautiful picture, in the



Luxembourg now, which is more eloquent of *entente cordiale* between England and France than all the after-dinner speeches. Just a Breton peasant tenderly covering the dead face of a drowned English child upon a rock-fringed, wreck-strewn shore.

Micklethwaite's Scotch reserve had made him admire her strict attention to the business always conducted in as few words as possible. From the first, he sometimes found himself actually interested in the clean copy, in the neat, decided writing, never slovenly or hurried. He noted that George Everard Stokes could give the literary touch to a perfectly commonplace subject with so light a hand as by no means to scare away that precious quantity, the ordinary reader ; that she had a pleasant humour and an aptness in quotation likely to appeal to the select few who have enough wit to perceive the one and enough education to care for the other.

Fraser Micklethwaite himself had had a hard struggle to arrive. Quite the traditional boyhood of bare feet and porridge and ambition. At forty he felt as if his ship were at anchor after encountering stormy seas, for the halfpenny *Morning Star* was succeeding, and its owners, if they were not likely to admit it, were aware that

they had got a good man when they had found Micklethwaite in the offices of a Scotch provincial journal.

It was only recently that he had found time to reflect that a home might, after all, have its solid advantages. Lodgings and scanty leisure at a club, he had merely regarded as the necessary surroundings of long, active hours concentrated upon the *Morning Star* and all regarding its prosperity. Then came a revelation upon a spring Sunday in the country, just then all blue-bells in the shade and all buttercups in the sunshine. For the first time since his boyhood he found himself haunted by the face of a girl—a girl with grave grey eyes and a severe gown of black. That was three months ago, and he had now slowly arrived at a decision that he intended to marry Miranda Ricordan. He had been so accustomed all his life to decide what he wanted, and to work until he got it, that he approached marriage in just the same spirit he had approached journalism, with the important difference that he thoroughly understood his readers, and was pitifully ignorant of women.

His quiet confidence was by no means born of conceit, but was rather the direct result of his success in his profession. Then, there was a

masculine slowness of perception confusing those very different entities, the man and the editor, in himself, and unaware that the respectful contributor, ignorant of her own value, was only George Everard Stokes, and not Miranda at all. He was supported, too, by the comfortable conviction of beginners in love that a woman's chief desire is a home of her own—in other words, a house in which she may make a husband comfortable. All this proved him as simple and old-fashioned as he really was, for his modernity began and ended with journalism.

Yet he gave Miranda no idea that it was not merely the editor who shook hands with her, but a man who felt almost shy in the presence of this stranger, all in soft lavender, bringing summer into Beaulieu Street under her wide hat, with some of its sunbeams imprisoned in a rippling glory of hair no longer brushed tightly back and half seen under a discreet veil.

The chilling conviction that she had interests, hopes, friends, outside the familiar precincts of copy and printer's ink, came for the first time, sending something like a pang to his heart. He had never thought her pretty until to-day, and even now did not guess that it was her own taste and skill making him believe what was

scarcely true. He found himself sternly checking a tendency to look at a little vagrant curl upon her forehead, though if his glance fell it was but to meet all those wonderful fresh frills of lavender lying on the dingy carpet.

"It is very good of you to see me at this busy time, Mr. Micklethwaite," began Miranda, serenely unaware and unconscious. "I wrote to you that I wanted a holiday at the end of July. Now, as my plans are altered, I intend to be away all August and perhaps part of September. I thought you ought to know, as for the last two years I have been so glad to take the place of various absentees, to make myself, I hope, a little useful to the *Star* in the silly season."

"I am sorry," said Micklethwaite, with his Highlander's very slight touch of Scotch accent. "The paper will miss you."

"George Stokes" looked up with a genuine flash of pleasure in her face, and the editor's heart unaccountably grew heavy. An inspiration came, and he acted upon it, forgetting official dignity.

"There would have been rather special opportunities for you this August. Bayfield will be absent, and I meant to have offered you his place."



Last week such a chance would have been seized with rapture. To-day Miranda only enjoyed the implied compliment to the work she suddenly felt would be merely irksome.

"You are very kind, but I do not think I can alter my arrangements." There was a friendliness in his tone altogether new, and she unconsciously changed hers a little. "The fact is, I have never had a chance before of a really good holiday, and I am going to Brittany to be idle."

"You are fortunate."

He spoke almost sadly, and Miranda felt puzzled. In the strong light she saw that he looked tired and fagged. Perhaps he too would have liked sounding seas and yellow sands. She saw him as he was for the first time, and wondered vaguely what he would be like out of Beaulieu Street.

"Do you leave soon?" he continued; "for there was something I wanted you to do, because we have no one in the place who could do it half as effectively. You'll maybe have read *Perfides*?"

It was Miranda, and not George, who answered, with hot cheeks and flashing eyes: "Read it! I should think I have."

"That is just what I expected you to say. Now, will you review it for Wednesday? You

know French, and you are a woman. Those are essentials for the reviewer. Just tell me how it strikes you. I want something brilliant, not a mere tame recapitulation of the plot. I hardly ever remember a real interest in a French novel before it has been translated. It may be a sign of awakening intelligence."

"Maurice Préal is a genius," she began reluctantly. "Every word of *Perfides* proves that. It is diabolically clever, and so splendidly written; every word tells. But how unworthy to devote the whole of such a book just to contrasting an Englishwoman and a Frenchwoman; to make both of them so utterly despicable, petty, and false. Préal understands us completely; that is the worst of it. English or French, to him it makes no difference. He can strip us of all our artificialities and meannesses, and show us as we are at our worst with that fine irony of his that stings. I think I had better not review *Perfides*. I want to forget it, and have been trying in vain."

"It would be well done if you did it."

He had never praised her before, and it was effective. It seemed to Miranda as if suddenly her correct business relations with her editor had become confused into something new and

different. How else would she have said, "And you—have you found time to read *Perfides*?"

"When I read I do not care for four hundred solid pages dealing with things of which I know nothing and care less. But I have heard enough about the book to make me sure I should disagree with every word in it."

Micklethwaite was not impulsive, but he made a very hasty decision and acted upon it as he spoke. To be plain and direct was always best. She was going away for a long time, and to-day had made him certain that he loved her. To tell her so was imperative. Letters between them had altogether too journalistic a significance. He had no time for more reflection, for more than an impossible wish that they two stood alone in that wood of wet bluebells, in the free stillness of the country, where he had thought of her.

"I am so glad to hear you say that. Good-bye, and thank you very much." Miranda rose as she spoke, and put out her hand.

"Will you stay a few minutes? I have something else to say, Miss Ricordan. I am not used to women, like Prével and his kind. But I want you to let me ask you to be my wife. This office is a poor sort of place for

such a question, and I wish we were just in the green spot where I first knew I cared. But I am so busy I never seem to have leisure to be myself ; and, after all, you only know me here."

The girl's colour faded. She was so astonished that she could only be quite silent.

"I dare say I have spoken too soon, but I love you as well as if I had waited another year to tell you so. I have had a dull time of hard work, and now I want a home—I want you."

Miranda looked up at his changed, eager face, and there were tears shining in her grey eyes. "I can't believe it is real, and you speaking. Why, you hardly know me."

"To me nothing else seems to matter at all. And I *do* know you. See how you have written yourself between thousands of your own lines. Do you suppose I have not found you there ? Did you never think, never guess ?"

His mind had been so full of her for months he forgot that all he said might be startlingly new to her, who had not thought of him at all.

"How could I know, when you have never made the slightest sign ? I am not for ever occupied with such ideas as Prével would tell you all women are. I was busy with my work whenever I was here. I thought of nothing else. It



is utterly impossible I should marry you. You say you have read between my lines, but that is not the right place to look for even a literary woman's heart. There is so much of me that is quite different. When I write I have a standard before me ; I do my best to reach it. You say I succeed. But when I'm *not* writing I am so very ordinary, so very faulty. I should hate to be judged just by my best, and not by the everyday self so very much more commonplace. If I am to be loved, it must not be for anything I can do."

There was a note of such certainty in her voice that Micklethwaite almost lost confidence. "You mean there is some one else," he said in a low tone. The old, old question, but this time not the old, old answer.

"No one. I have never cared for any one yet."

He illogically found hesitation in that last word, and caught at it. "Not yet. Then I shall not be hopeless. Let me teach you how to care when you come back to work and to me. I could be very patient. I have always had to wait for everything, but I have always got what I wanted at last."

The shrill ring of the telephone filled a silent

pause. It set Miranda free, and sharply reminded Micklethwaite that he had to be an editor first and a man afterwards. That he was so little conscious of the incongruity of the situation showed him, as usual, occupied in proceeding with bold directness toward any object he might have in view.

"I must go now," she said with relief. "But please believe me when I say it is impossible."

"That I shall never believe until you are married. Good-bye."

His firm voice was so quiet, they might almost have been talking of copy, thought Miranda as she went perturbedly downstairs. It was the first time in her life that this experience had come to her, and a woman is but half a woman till it does come. Until now she had been very adroit in keeping her men friends friends, and not even suspecting they might wish to be lovers. Here least of all had she been prepared, and that she felt she was now much better qualified to write the great novel, and was half ashamed of herself for so thinking, was inevitable.

But it had all seemed incredible. Alice, of *Perfides*, she decided, might have enjoyed the idea that she had actually won a heart by her

pen, might even have cleverly written to that end. There might be a fitness in fiction for the editor to marry a promising contributor—it sounded like a short story in a magazine ; but in fact—no. That tall, strong figure in the black coat was an editor, not a possible husband. She had not even known or cared to know before if he were married. He had always been respectful, polite. To picture him, quite removed from dusty inkstands, dreaming of her in green, solitary places, like a romantic schoolboy, was too difficult.

Did every one, then, care once in a lifetime ? That question haunted her persistently. The “Perfides” themselves loved between their intervals of cold-blooded mischief-making. She hardly knew what had brought those tears to her eyes, unless it was a sudden hunger to share in these good things of which the poets sang and the languid summer breeze spoke softly. It was mysterious, uncomfortable. How was she to remain George Stokes to this seeker after Miranda ? Well, there was the golden stretch of holiday lying between. She would forget as soon as she could, and he would doubtless do the same. It could be nothing but just a fancy. She had not vanity enough to guess that romance had begun

and ended for Fraser Micklethwaite on this July morning.

Back at the flat, with Dick barking a welcome, the whole thing slipped into the background. It was like reading an unsatisfactory novel, and laying it down to return to the real world, to find it a much pleasanter place than an embarrassing land of quick changes and long arms of coincidence. That she could eat her lunch and enjoy Francine's famous *salade à vingt légumes*, proved her, she decided, quite unworthy of having been the heroine of that little drama in Beaulieu Street.

Her mind rested on the thought that she could turn the page decisively. She was glad she had had the resolution to refuse to review *Perfidies*, though it had been difficult. She would say good-bye even to literature for a while. She made that resolve without reflecting that to keep it would be impossible for her, who loved her favourite authors as dearly as her friends. Literature was inextricably entangled with her life, peopling her fancy and warming her heart.

She found a letter upon the table, and opened it hurriedly, to read it with a smile.

"MY DEAR MIRANDA,—The Missus is so pleased at the notion of going abroad that she



says I am to write and tell you so. She will be in town to-morrow, and wants, of course, to shop. She says she has nothing to wear, but you and I are used to hearing that. The men will go to grandmamma, and their old Daddy's cricket tour begins next Friday at Scarborough. I am glad Daisy will really get the sort of good time she seems to want, and glad it will be with you. It was rather rough luck to leave her at home when I went last year, so I've told her to take a cheque and send for more when it's done. She has been looking a bit white, but I know you'll take care of her. All the beasts are well. The pup joins the family in love to you and Dick.

"Yours always,

"ARCHIE MOSTYN."

"So we can start in two days. The sooner the better, too. Francine, Mrs. Mostyn comes to-morrow, and will go with us to Brittany when she has consumed the famous fowl."

"Heaven be thanked that Mademoiselle will have a *dame mariée* with her, as should ever be the case with one so well bred. Oh, that poor little lady, living always in the *triste* country, what a joy for her! In France, also, Madame often makes the voyage of pleasure without Monsieur. It is sometimes more gay. Madame

Mostyn is so charming, and her babies are true angels."

"The babies, however, remain with their grandmother ; and a married lady who is twenty-two and persists in looking eighteen, is not a protection for an old maid almost thirty."

"Say it not," protested Francine. "You count still by twenty, dear Mademoiselle, and have but the air of twenty-five. If I expire not upon that horrible vessel, I shall be *femme de chambre* to both, and proud to present my aged mother to such ladies. If but you would wear the mourning, the so graceful veil, you might be Parisienne."

"To mourn would be a farce. I go as I am. And as to the inheritance, why, it is so small you need not mention it at all."

Francine shook her head, and looked fondly at a little open tart of fresh strawberries she had just served. "Mademoiselle knows not St. Briac. There one must tell all, for they are of a curiosity insatiable. They will never comprehend your living alone with but your poor Francine."

"Well, Francine, one secret you must keep. I do not desire that even the aged mother should know I am a writer."

"*Dame*, Mademoiselle, she is already aware that some write books, and that it is well enough for those who have no work to do; but when she sees you she will be certain you pass all your time in going into the world."

Miranda spent her last solitary evening quietly at home. As she sat in her cool muslins, with her fragrant coffee beside her, she thought of Fraser Micklethwaite in his hot room in Beau-lieu Street, every second occupied with that eternal getting out of the *Morning Star*. There was moonlight, making even the Chelsea river the "sweet Thames" of the poets, flowing onwards in a liquid wonder of shimmering loveliness. Soon she would hear the sea itself singing its low lullaby to the land. "Côte d'Emeraude." Her fancy wandered luxuriously along sandy, shell-strewn beaches and over thymy downs, starred with tiny flowers. Surely there she should find what she wanted, a setting for the great novel.

She was so absolutely free to do as she chose, and freedom was still such a delight. Yet, if she had loved, she supposed that the willing surrender of that freedom would have been sweeter still. She tried, quite in vain, to see herself in those regions or any others with that

serious companion at her side, with his honest eyes and faint Northern burr. Never. She felt more sure that it would be never than she had ever been of any fact in her life. The *dot* was assuredly not for Fraser Micklethwaite, who knew nothing of its existence.

A misgiving came over her that she was hard and unwomanly not to have been more moved. If he had written, and written very well, she was conscious it might have been different. But there in the office it was all so hopelessly prosaic. Love-scenes on the stage always took place in such delightful places, and heroines knew by instinct how to refuse their lovers elegantly. She had only blurted out a few clumsy words. At the beginning of that interview he had ranked her as a writer with Claude Bayfield himself. If he had only stopped there, how well it would have been. Now she was left with the sobering conviction that it was perhaps to Miranda Ricordan he offered such praise, and not to George Everard Stokes at all.



## CHAPTER II

### A JOURNEY IN QUEST OF ROMANCE

“**T**O eat Francine’s chicken, with that sauce, makes me feel more like myself again,” said Mrs. Archie Mostyn, as she sat with Miranda in the flat, festive with great bunches of wood-suggesting foxgloves and honeysuckles in every corner. “Now, how does she make it?”

Miranda repeated the question to the delighted Bretonne.

“Madame,” answered Francine solemnly, “it is a secret confided to me by a famous chef, now, alas! no more. I would confide it you, but it would take long to tell. I have watched it to-day a full hour, adding from time to time herbs and other little matters, and I rejoice that I have not failed in my inspirations, for I was much overcome by fear that the parsley was, after all, in excess.”

“Imagine any cook I ever had enjoying her

work like that. Oh, Miranda, we are always changing, and changing for the worse. Archie is very good, but sometimes I'm nearly in despair. Eleven in four years. But always lumpy melted butter. To forget housekeeping will be such a blessing, if only my precious babies keep well and I don't want them too badly. For, you know, when you get used to a baby, it is very difficult to do without its little arms clinging round your neck. You were a dear to ask Archie to let me come ; he has got cricket averages, and nothing else, on the brain just now. I am not blaming him ; it's not his fault ; it's simply in the air down there. Do you know that, strong fellow as he is, he absolutely shook with nervousness when he played for the county for the first time. He was almost afraid to let me go, for fear I should have to face the disgrace of seeing him bowled first ball. I really think he thought I should never survive it if it had ever happened, which of course it didn't. Sometimes I wish balls had never been invented. In the country, people are so absolutely measured by their capacity to do things with them. No one talks of anything else. If it's not polo, it's cricket, or football, or tennis, or golf, or croquet, or hockey ; and because I'm such a duffer at it all,

I am nothing and nobody. Let me grumble a little. I don't at home, though I often wish I could. I listen, and people do not seem to dislike me ; but as to trying to talk of anything I care for, there is no one, till I get to you, who even imagines that cricket averages are not thrilling. Miranda, don't be shocked, but sometimes I do get so deadly tired of it all. Once, like a goose, I did say to the Vicar's wife that it was rather solitary. 'If you took up poultry, Mrs. Mostyn, you would never know a dull hour,' was her answer. 'Why, by looking after my dear fowls entirely myself, getting up sometimes in the depth of winter at four o'clock, I cleared fourteen pounds at the year's end.' Think of only fourteen pounds for all that cold and misery, red hands, and perhaps rheumatism ! She is really worse than the golfers. With them I only have to listen ; but she drags me out into the mud, and wants me to admire a creature she calls a Buff Orpington. I get a dreadful sort of feeling that I badly want to have my own share of life and fun before I'm too old. I feel intellectually starved. If I had been a writer, like you, for instance !"

"My dear, you would have found difficulties there too—crops of disappointments and draw-

backs. It is not all chicken *sauté* and honey-suckles, even in the flat. And the outdoor people are, at any rate, always thoroughly honest and wholesome, which is more than can invariably be said for the journalists you perversely regard as existing in a sort of wonderful Bohemia, all dinners at the Cecil and witty speeches. Why, when I come down to you I positively enjoy the accounts of how people I never knew played an equally unknown team at hockey. It is so restful."

"For a fortnight, perhaps. Nearly everything is good just for a fortnight."

Daisy Mostyn was pale, and her blue eyes lacked lustre. When she looked her best, she was one of the women all men admire, and all women fail to understand why; but she had not yet made the dangerous discovery. Miranda was too good a friend to her husband not to be sorry to see the girl's depression, too much of a woman not to understand it.

"Change is what you want, and we will have a good time," she said cheerfully. "*You* shall forget the servants and the averages. *I* am going to forget George Everard Stokes."

"But I shall not let you do that. I shall so like telling people about you, and finding



they've read your articles and know you are quite a celebrity!"

"Look here, little country mouse," interrupted Miranda, "I want you to make me a promise not to do any of these things. I am just as anxious to forget I'm a journalist as you are to forget the cook and the poultry farm. If I make any friends, I don't want journalism to have anything to do with the matter. I do not wish to be eternally judged by my little scrap of capacity in one direction. Writing women are such bores when they talk about their work as if nothing else was worth a capital letter. Surely you require far more real thought to make a sauce like Francine's than to scribble a lot of silly little paragraphs about Lady So-and-so's Chows. It would be much simpler to write one of those excursions into the objectionable curious old maids call "powerful" novels than to train up your curly-headed men in the way they ought to go. I mean to get quite out of my groove, so that I may do something really good when I get back into it. I am ambitious, and not too modest. This little bit of money just sets me free to do my best by-and-by, if it is only to fail when I have done it. Meanwhile, I want to use my freedom by forgetting pens

and ink, and finding Romance. It only comes when you don't look. We will just be happy in the summer, and put all our worries aside. Your part in my great novel is to keep me from thinking about it."

"Not an altogether easy matter when I am so interested myself, but I will try. But, Miranda, when you say 'romance,' do you only mean just in a literary sense? Don't you ever want love, and marriage, and all the rest, for yourself? You always say no one has ever proposed to you. I simply don't believe it."

Miranda smiled. "One man did once, I confess, but the reasons he gave were so poor, it did not tempt me. I think he liked me because I wrote well—or he thought so. That was not at all enough to make me like him."

"To be twenty-nine, and never to have cared for any one, seems to me about impossible," said Daisy, who had been engaged with her hair waving over her shoulders in rippling masses. "All the beginning part is so nice."

"It may be; but, veteran as I am, Daisy, the whole thing is to me something of a mystery. It comes once to all women, unless all the poets and novelists are wrong. Perhaps my mature age may help me to keep my common sense when

it happens my way. An old girl playing the kitten is too horrible."

"I think I am too old, or something, to be quite happy. If I told you just how I felt, you would despise me," put in Daisy dolefully.

"I shall go on loving you under any conditions ; but don't confide in me yet. It is so likely you will wish you never had a little later."

Daisy sighed. "I dare say you are right, only it *is* good to talk about one's self sometimes, after the monotony of the everlasting games. It is so humiliating to feel you are not as interesting as a ball. If I had just one sympathetic friend at home I could bear it."

"Be very thankful you have nothing of the sort. No one ever yet was sorry who kept her troubles to herself, and half of us are miserable because we have let a pack of daws peck at the hearts worn on our sleeves for their benefit in some unlucky hour. Don't think me cruel."

"Well, just tell me, at any rate, what literary people talk about now."

"Their subject is more monotonous than cricket, for they want to make a kind of international crisis out of a bit of clever fiction. I shall be as glad to hear the very last of *Perfidies* as you will be to find no averages at St. Enogat.

Everybody has read the reviews, and a few even the book. Préval has taken a sort of fiendish delight in picking woman to pieces, just as a naughty child pulls off the wings of a fly. When he has done his worst with his own compatriots, he honours us by crossing the Channel and proving it six to one and half a dozen of the other. Désirée is as intolerable as Alice, and they are both entirely real. They are authoresses too, which makes it more exasperating. The writing man used to be supposed to hate the writing woman, but Préval is really outrageous. He takes a rapier, not a bludgeon, and goes to work with the skill of the best of fencers. So can you wonder I am just a little tired of your friend George, who has been wincing under this unprovoked assault—a little eager to be Miranda, and to ignore the fact that I am ever anybody else?"

In *Punch*, at any rate, the Channel is always rough, the steamboat passengers all bad sailors. But that July evening, when at eight o'clock the boat started for St. Malo, was the exception to all rules. The air was absolutely still, and the only difficulty was to determine whether the rose-flushed sky or the rose reflections on the calm water were the lovelier. Every one nowadays



has travelled so much and so far that the pleasure these two girls found in every well-worn detail might have been regarded with rather scornful amusement. But Daisy had not left England since her marriage, and to Miranda France was a second country by loving adoption. Southampton took on strange splendours of sunset colour, and the great ships in the dock loomed out large in a prodigal glory of golden light.

Francine, her ruddy countenance white with fear, had descended despairingly to the cabin. "If only we are not drowned, and if I but survive!" she moaned piteously. "Ah, it is fine to see the world if that could be done without boats."

Dick, after noisy resentment of his unwonted chain, had accepted the situation like a philosopher, and lay at Miranda's feet, with his bright eyes fixed upon a basket whence an occasional dolorous "Miau!" proclaimed the presence within.

The stars came out as the soft darkness fell reluctantly, and the tired Daisy went to bed whilst the boat glided down Southampton Water. But Miranda was too full of enjoyment of the starlit beauty of sea and sky to want sleep yet. There were not many people on board; the August crowd was ten days distant. But she

had noticed near her, in a Bath chair, a young, pale Frenchman, evidently an invalid, with large, serene eyes, and an expression of enduring patience.

The mystery of pain sets its seal upon those who have had to take terrible glances into its profounder depths. Sometimes rebellion marks the mouth with hard lines, or apathetic selfishness robs the glance of any interest in life. This man had an air of that brave resignation which was a silent confession of faith that he was not suffering his martyrdom in vain, which so impressed Miranda that she greatly desired to speak to the solitary-seeming traveller. Opportunity was favourable, for he dropped a small sketch-book he was holding, and she restored it with a bow and a word in French. There was an evident pleasure in his acknowledgment of this slight service, as if he too had been taking note of the neighbour with so much splendid hair shining under her chiffon veil.

"I hope you have liked England," she began lamely.

"Greatly, Madame. The kindness I have everywhere received will never be forgotten by me. I expected a dismal London of fog, a melancholy people. I found a brilliant capital,

full of beautiful women and bright sunshine. I made the acquaintance, too, of certain splendid gentlemen I had long known by repute—Sir Reynolds and Sir Lawrence, and Hoppner and Romney. I ceased to be sorry for our exiled Meissoniers and Watteaus when I saw them lodged in such a palace as that Wallace treasure-house. I had to face sorrow in England, and English strangers helped me to bear it.”

There was a note of intense resigned sadness in the low, clear voice. “He has lost some one for whom he cared greatly,” decided Miranda to herself, rushing to the woman’s favourite conclusion, and utterly at fault, as she soon knew. Her conviction aroused sympathy in her heart, which, although she did not guess it, had been softened strangely by that matter-of-fact courtship in Beaulieu Street. The two fell very naturally and easily into an almost intimate conversation of art, of music, of literature. She told him proudly how her father’s one masterpiece was in the Luxembourg, and he could flatter her by his knowledge of its least detail.

“It makes you, Madame, a little of a Frenchwoman to be at home in the Luxembourg. For me, I have been half English since I could read Shakespeare. And I have been to his fairyland

and seen the eglantines in the sweet calm lanes of Warwick. I have been solitary in that church where he sleeps. It is a holy shrine for such pilgrims as I am. There is the very spirit of Shakespeare over it all, and the scent of the lilies in that sanctuary perfumes all my remembrance. I have seen, too, the cottage of Milton, where the bees were making music to remind us of the honey-sweetness of *L'Allegro*—that, too, in a village all peace and flowers. And I have been in Westminster and seen the fleur-de-lis of France on the graves of English kings, and not regretted to feel our history linked so closely. And you, Madame, who possess our language, ah ! but absolutely, do you care a little for France ?”

“Not a little,” said Miranda. “Much. The very word ‘France’ recalls to me a small girl gathering stars of Bethlehem under the firs of Fontainebleau, and singing, ‘Trempe ton pain, Marie,’ as she played. I was that fortunate child. And in my little home in London I have a *bonne à tout faire*, that I may talk to her and keep my memory evergreen as she chatters.”

“Ah, but that is a Breton child-song. I am myself Breton ; that touches me nearly.”

“Bretagne is all new for me. I only know it



as Loti land. But I am going to stay for six weeks at St. Enogat, and make a Brittany of my own. I am not so silly as to think I can know anything really about it all in such a little time, but I hope I shall be able to get my own impression, not some one else's, and it will be precious to me just because it *is* my own. I shall not be like an artist with time and capacity to give loving care to a detailed masterpiece, but I may get a little study in blue seas and gold sunshine."

His face brightened. "I also stay at St. Enogat awhile."

"I am glad we shall meet again," she said very simply, and, much encouraged, he talked on with a sort of picturesqueness of phrase, a frequent flash of imagination that caught her fancy and lit her animated face with interest. He told her of his beautiful birthplace, Le Guildo, with its ruined castle, where the legends cling about the mouldering walls as thickly as the ivy. It all suited the persuasive charm of the summer night, and both forgot the lateness of an hour which for Victor de Verton counted for so much.

For presently they were interrupted by a respectful servant, who asked if his master

desired to be carried to his cabin, and, putting back the apron of the chair, revealed the cruel fact that the limbs beneath it were twisted in a hopeless deformity—the shrunken limbs of a child.

“Leave me yet ten minutes, my good Jules.”

Then he turned to Miranda, whose pity sought and failed to find any word, and spoke in good English: “I have, I fear, given you a shock, Madame. You see, I am not as you have thought until now. But if you knew how very sweet and rare it is for me to be helped to forgetfulness by one who knew not the misfortune I have endured since infancy! All the kindness I receive is founded on pity, sometimes hard to bear. When I spoke of the sorrow in England, it was that I made this journey to your greatest surgeon. When he told me hope and cure were never for me, he did so with such an infinite compassion, such complete sympathy! For this enchanted evening I have been as are other men with a charming, gifted lady.”

Miranda held out her hand impulsively. “I shall not pity you, but admire you for your courage and patience, and to me you will always be what I have found you.”

He kissed the hand with a winning deference,

and as his man carried him away, muffled in his cloak, she only saw the clear-cut face, the dark eyes above the small, dark moustache.

Daisy Mostyn was asleep when Miranda at last lay down in her berth, and her final waking thought was that romance had met her very soon, and that she had already found a hero delightfully remote from Fleet Street. With all her resolution, she could not yet detach her mind from its wonted track. Her work was still enshrined in the high place of her heart.

If there are few of life's minor miseries more detestable than an early bathless toilet in a small steamboat, there are few joys to those of the right spirit like the delicious, if illogical, sense of vague expectancy arrival at an unknown port inspires. What matter if it be a port as near as St. Malo, if it be but new, and set between such an amazing brilliancy of sparkling sea and summer sky?

Everything combines to make it like a well-set scene in a theatre, rather than the dirty little town it really is. There is the charm of the distant deep green background, the pearl-grey foreground of the ramparts, the rich, remote cadences of some distant, ancient church-bell sounding a note of summons to morning thanks-

giving. There are glimpses of streets so lavish in promises of colour, of a glittering quaintness in the wares in the dark shops, imagination hurries up them captive. St. Malo is well worthy of being the key of Brittany, the beginning—or is it the end?—of the coast of emerald so altogether equalling its reputation, as it lies basking in the July radiance, splendidly assuring a ripe abundance of fruit in hidden gardens.

Daisy Mostyn looked especially fresh and pretty in the searching light, which could find no wrinkles upon her young, pleased face. Was it, could it be, but two days since, that she had quailed before the dread, familiar ordeal of giving an impossible cook notice?

Francine, compelled to admit she had slept, began a shrill tale of fearful dreams, to which no one listened. As she stepped from the boat she fell almost into the arms of a very stout lady in a speckless cap, pressing forward with a basket of raspberries.

“It is the Cousine Séraphine herself,” she shrieked in ecstasy. “See you well, Mesdames, she comes to the market, and presents you her homage. She is of St. Briac, she, and comes all the Tuesdays to make what she can. Behold, Séraphine, the gracious lady to whom I am *femme*



*de chambre*, and Madame Mostyn, who resides in a château of the most splendid."

Séraphine, acknowledging the introduction with much stateliness, and letting off pious ejaculations at the wonder and glory of so miraculous a meeting, attended them to the very door of the custom house.

After an almost tearful parting, Francine turned to her mistress and remarked complacently, "It is indeed well I wore my best. She is a chatterer, that one, who will tell all in St. Briac. Her eyes were upon the bags, the rings of the ladies, their hats—all."

Reunited to the luggage, they proceeded to the Dinard boat, upon which passengers were being embarked with more bustle than would have despatched an English regiment to South Africa.

"Is it all this dramatic exaggeration of the details of life that makes the French enjoy it so?" asked Miranda, laughing as she emerged victorious from a desperate verbal battle with an extortionate porter, with whom, however, Francine had had the last word.

"You, you wear golden buttons and would defraud the poor man," he had howled insultingly.

"And if Madame does wear buttons of true gold," cut in the faithful servant, with a contempt for accuracy no compatriot would have stigmatised by any harsher name, "it is because she guards well her money when she has given such brigands twice what they deserve."

Victor de Verton, white and weary after sleepless hours of suffering, waited in his chair until he could be placed in a sailing boat, and smiled as Miranda greeted him in passing. But the smile faded into his habitual expression of grave patience as he saw Daisy Mostyn avert her head, as if the sight of him was painful to her.

"It is always the beauties who are like that," he thought. "They are so often looking at their own delightful reflections they forget all the world cannot be of the same pattern. Or perhaps in the summer freshness I am like a grim *memento mori*, and people do not want to be reminded of Death unless, as to me, he comes in Heaven's own hour as the angel of deliverance."

There was breeze enough to fill the sails of a small boat, and presently de Verton half forgot his pain in pride in the beauty of his native land along that smiling shore of purple rocks and yellow, shell-strewn, seagull-haunted bays.

## CHAPTER III

### ST. ENOGAT

THERE are few hotels better abused and more regularly patronised than the Grand Hôtel Beau Séjour at St. Enogat, whence Dinard may be so conveniently enjoyed by the frugal, without its sometimes alarming prices. Most of the bedrooms are wretched, and all the dinners excellent. Great new salons have been promised by the smiling landlord these twenty years ; but, after all, why should he trouble to build when he can cram his ramshackle caravanseraï right through the season ? His private theory is that, if the cheap pensionnaire is really well fed, he will put up with a good deal, and, in support of it, the existing salons are positive miracles of ugliness and want of ventilation.

But the weedy garden, fiery with unkempt scarlet geraniums, is set above so irresistible a view that even the untidy little villas, with their wonderful names and scanty furniture, usually

find good tenants. A marked feature of the Beau Séjour is the presence of numerous families, French and English, who come to it annually, apparently either to register a vow that they will never do so again, or in a beautiful spirit of faith that Monsieur Rotron really meant what he said. It is undeniably cheerful, popular, and flourishing, if none too clean and rather undeserving of the high favour it enjoys. Up in the village, in the little square dominated by a tall Calvary, with a pathetic, pale Christ, there are tempting-looking inns with verandahs full of hydrangeas and roses. But the Beau Séjour ranks first by reason of its view or its chef—a majestic personage, yet not disdainful of commendations when he comes out to breathe the air and seek, it may be, inspiration for his eternal menu.

The first impression was a bright one as Miranda and Daisy Mostyn drove up to the main entrance in a dashing manner, their ancient horses stimulated to action by wild cries from the coachman. Monsieur Rotron came in person to give the accustomed cordial welcome, coupled with the equally accustomed announcement that the rooms he had so readily promised by telegram could not be ready till next morning. He had, however, apartments in the Villa Fashoda where



for a moment Mesdames could be at their ease. Miranda decided at once in her own mind that the villa, heavily shaded by trees, would be cooler and quieter than the hotel, but prudently refrained from an immediate bargain, and insisted that all the luggage should be left in the passage. "We can take out what we want," she told Daisy, "but if we are too pleased he will demand higher terms, which would matter to me, if not to you."

After lunch, and in fresh white dresses, they sat luxuriously at a small table in the garden over their coffee, looking at their neighbours with interest and a delicious sense of idleness, Daisy completely unconscious that she was being very much admired by a slight, sallow Frenchman making a pretence of breakfast, and a reality of glasses of vermouth, close beside them.

They were not long left in peace, for a lean Englishwoman, with a sharp red face, devoid of all expression except curiosity, came up to them with a smile, showing the gold stopping in her large front teeth, and addressed Miranda abruptly :

"I must introduce myself. I am the chaplain's wife, Mrs. Sturge, and, of course, feel it my duty — my agreeable duty — to welcome newcomers. It is so pleasant to bring all the really

nice people together, and to organise picnics and games in the evening instead of the everlasting Bridge and that dreadful little Casino at Dinard. It is rather a drawback to the place that there are so many foreigners here. One never quite knows who they are, and it does not do to get mixed up with them. I speak French, of course—we have been here seven seasons—and if you want any help in arranging terms or anything, I shall be so pleased. Rotron is terrible for extras.”

“You are very kind, but I have lived some years in France,” said Miranda, seeking for a sufficient amount of civility to mask her prompt private determination not to have too much to do with those really nice people. She knew them of old, and their deadly dullness, and foresaw that the condescending affability of Mrs. Sturge was doomed to freeze early into chilly reserve.

“Now, do introduce your young friend,” pursued that lady, seating herself in the chair just vacated by the vermouth-drinker, and fingering a long, rattling chain of green beads as she revealed an immense pair of white canvas shoes in the process.

“Mrs. Archie Mostyn—Mrs. Sturge,” obeyed Miranda.

"Miss Ricordan—Mrs. Sturge," added Daisy, with a groundless hope of cutting the interview short.

"So pleased to meet Mrs. Mostyn. You won't mind my asking if you are one of *the* Mostyns?"

Daisy looked puzzled.

Miranda answered for her: "I do not think Mrs. Mostyn quite knows who they are."

"Oh, then you are not related to Lord St. Merrian."

"My husband is a sort of cousin. He is touring with him in the same cricket team now. You know, he plays for Marsetshire."

"Oh, indeed!"

As she said these two words, Mrs. Sturge decided that Daisy was distinctly worth knowing, and Miranda much too confident. She therefore set briskly to work to ask impertinent questions, without, however, any idea of being rude, and in the honest conviction that her cross-examination was conversation, and she herself making a charming impression. That so plain a person could have such superb self-satisfaction was really rather enviable, thought Miranda, as she wondered greatly at it.

"And now you will want to know something

about the people here. Later on I shall hope to introduce you to dear old Mr. and Mrs. Medlicott and their daughter ; they have been here for thirteen years, and quite lead everything. That young man who was here staring so is Armand Deruche, the tennis champion of France. Quite a dreadful person, but so utterly spoilt by the fast set in Dinard. They call him 'Tou-Tou,' and he looks it. Over there, with the black poodle, is Mrs. Scott-Battersby, who has the Villa Souriante, up the road. Really, Mrs. Mostyn, I should not like to repeat the stories told of her before an unmarried lady, but the baccarat alone is a perfect disgrace. Oh, and, as usual, there goes Major Herapath, simply tied to that terrible woman's apron-strings."

For the first time both listeners looked interested, as a short, handsome man, in immaculate flannels, bowed to Mrs. Sturge, and passed on. His glance just fell upon Daisy Mostyn, and she felt a sensation she could not define, for she was so simple she did not yet understand what those glances meant. How did painted persons like the lady in that exaggerated gown always have all these nice men at their disposal ? she pondered. She herself was years younger, and—and not ugly, and she had none of these exciting friendships.



"Is it really the Major Herapath who carried Sir John Arbuthnot out of action at Spion Kop?" asked Miranda eagerly.

"Well, I believe there was some story about it; but, after all, it is time to forget the war, and he only did his duty. There was too much fuss made about it, I think, and the way he goes on here——"

To Daisy's keen disappointment, Mrs. Sturge cut her sentence short abruptly as a Bath chair stopped close to them, and its pale occupant said, with a smile, always touching to those who saw it, "Good morning again, Mesdames. I hope you are rested, and pleased with our little St. Enogat and with the view."

It was Victor de Verton, accompanied by a distinguished old lady with elaborately arranged grey hair, and a blue-eyed, black-eyelashed girl of twenty-five, with a figure so perfect that those who saw her constantly forgot that she was by no means a beauty.

"I know, Madame, that I have to thank you for much kindness to my nephew on the boat. Forgive me that I venture to present myself," said the old lady, with a fascinating bow and that winning willingness to charm which is the heritage of a race never sharing the ground-

less British fear of making itself too pleasant. Madame de Verton had held her little court in Paris as a bride of eighteen ; she held it still as a widow of seventy.

Mrs. Sturge had distributed the clumsy nods which constituted her idea of dignified salutations to the party she obviously regarded with disfavour, and moved quickly away with a visible air of annoyance, although not too far to feel a vague irritation at the sound of Miranda's French. The introductions were then made with a pretty air of ceremony and much grace, and "My aunt, Madame de Verton," and "My cousin, Mademoiselle Yvonne de la Rivière," heard with secret surprise that the blonde miss, as they had thought her, was married, and that Miranda was not.

"But I fear, should we venture to take these chairs, we should deprive you of the company of your friend," hesitated Madame de Verton, using her black fan vigorously with a little plump hand sparkling with rings.

"Mrs. Sturge has but this moment informed us with whom we had the honour of speaking," said Miranda gravely.

"Then without offence I may say that when your good priests have leave to marry they sometimes piously select to do penance instead. Who

should believe she was of the same race as Madame Mostyn, who is truly exquisite ? ”

Madame de Verton dropped her voice slightly, but Daisy, whose French was the French of the English schoolgirl, was shyly talking in English to Victor and Yvonne, and did not hear her.

“ Figure to yourself, she once said that it was a pity our poor Victor was allowed to be seen, and he heard her. Had she spoken the strange tongue she believes French, he had never known ; but, as you hear, he possesses well your language. As to Yvonne, she is properly English in all her enthusiasms. She is superb at the lawn-tennis ; even the English themselves she surpasses. My poor Victor tells me that he has found England a veritable paradise, and that you were of a heavenly complaisance to him on the boat. I prayed him to visit Lourdes rather than your great doctors, and thus avoid that dangerous crossing ; but he recounts marvels of their goodness, and almost inspires me to voyage also. I am much occupied at the moment with a little fête for the orphans of two poor fishermen drowned in Iceland. The motive is not gay, but —what will you ?—at Dinard there must always be amusement. I am of the committee. There are to be tableaux, and Madame would be a *succès*

*fou*. That fresh look, that air of innocence—those are rare charms. For charity it is permitted to be very bold, and you, Mademoiselle, if I dare say it, you are precisely what I need for an inspiration that has haunted me. Your hairs are glorious—it is but an old woman who tells you so—and recall immediately a most celebrated lady. You know that Maurice Préval has a little villa at St. Briac. All Dinard reads as its sole literature *Perfides*. Even in your country you may have heard of it.”

“Madame, we hear of nothing else, and we are very angry with Monsieur Préval. His Anglaise is no Anglaise *pour rire*.”

“Ah, you must not be too severe. It is only the *femme auteur* he detests. For he is the good friend of Victor, and he has had sorrows enough to make him a little cruel in his books, but never to spoil the heart. You know, then, those miniatures of the heroines disposed with such taste outside the yellow cover. I would make as it were a great book of silk of such a yellow, spread on two screens, the title printed between in black letters of velvet, and I would cut two holes and arrange two frames with the veritable heads simulating the pictures. It is easy. The ladies kneel concealed; only the heads are seen. Yvonne



will make well Désirée ; this morning I at last behold Alice—the tint, the chic, all ! Figure to yourself the surprise, the applause, and in the midst our Préval, amazed. It would be well seen that it was no transformation you wore, and for a *demoiselle à marier* it is not too bad that such things should be known. Nor would I dare to invite you unless I knew it was also customary in England. Forgive me if I speak too freely, but already your *femme de chambre* has told the valet of Victor that you have inherited a fortune and come to Dinard for a purpose that, with all your talents, can be but too easy.”

Miranda could not help being amused, but it was amusement with a background of apprehension. “Dear Madame, you are most good,” she began, “but Francine, alas ! is not exact. I am one of those eccentrics who desire to remain single, and the money is but a trifle of a few thousand francs, not worth the attention of any good *parti*. As for the tableaux, I really do not think——”

“Say it not, Mademoiselle,” besought Madame de Verton. “Reflect with pity, if you will, on the widow and on the babies, where another would reflect upon her coiffure. It is an idea so modern, so unusual. And for the friend I have

a thought. She shall be the Snow Queen in the fairy tales, with all those adorable infants of my friends as her snowflakes. Imagine the white chiffon, the silver sequins. It is not much I ask. To exhibit a little the charms for a good work, to make agreeable acquaintances—it is, after all, a duty to society. I am old, but I repose not. I run about to make a marriage for Yvonne, and to make bread for those innocent orphans, in all this heat. You will not refuse me, I see it well. I will come again for my answer.”

Another moment, and Madame de Verton had bowed herself briskly away beside the Bath chair, without ceasing to talk for a single second.

Daisy looked after them. “Oh, Miranda, what nice people! They talked English so well, and he said such charming things of you that I forgot—everything. He says he is not Monsieur de Verton, because there is an elder brother, but only Monsieur Victor.”

“Victor. I think it suits him. Every hour he can be cheerful is a victory. Be very good to him, Daisy.”

They were both silent, Daisy because she was thinking of the look Herapath had given her, and, unconsciously, thinking she would like him to put its meaning into words.

"It is funny," she began again, "but I didn't mind it a bit, though they were both full of tennis and nothing else. Mademoiselle Yvonne is going to play here in a tournament for the Ladies' Challenge Cup of France, and they take it quite as seriously as they do at home."

"And Madame de Verton—she is aunt to Monsieur—talked chiefly of *Perfides*. We have not had to wait long to pick up the old threads. It is not so easy to get quite away as it seemed."

"Oh, but everything else is so lovely and so new. How I shall think of the blue, blue sky, and the sea, and the red, red geraniums, when I'm taking duty-walks in the mud and feeling a hundred."

Daisy's cheeks were flushed as she spoke, with her eyes brightening.

"Do you want to be a fairy queen in the midst of a lot of tiny French fairy attendants, with all Dinard looking at the picture?" inquired Miranda.

"I think if I had a really nice gown, it might be rather fun. But what a silly question to ask."

"It is what Madame de Verton has asked. She is getting up some tableaux for the orphans

of a poor fisherman. They are to be in the Casino theatre—the pictures, not the orphans.”

Daisy's colour deepened. “She asked me to be a queen—*here*, where there must be heaps and heaps of pretty people?”

“Yes, and she meant it. What is more, she wants me to be one of the *Perfides* themselves. I don't think I care for the idea.”

The longing to shine, to be admired, starved for four years, surged up unmanageably in Daisy's heart. “Do consent, for my sake, Miranda. I am sure these de Vertons are what that horrid Mrs. Sturge might not call nice people, but every one else would. Think of being right *in* it all, not just looking on. You said yourself you were sick of being George Stokes. Think how dull it must be to be always nobody.”

Miranda yielded, with one stipulation: “You will have to ask Archie.”

“Oh, if I tell him I want to, it will be quite enough, and of course I will.”

That ready answer made Miranda a little uneasy. The latent novelist saw possibilities. “If this child has no notion her husband might be jealous, it is not for me to put such ideas into her head. She puzzles me, for in these few



hours she has come out in a new character. At home she is just the wife of a man who plays for the county; here she is evidently already regarded as prettier than we ever thought her. So she is. Who would recognise the doleful Martha of yesterday, sighing over Francine's sauce, in this pleasure-snatching little Snow Queen in embryo?"

They incurred the lasting displeasure of Mrs. Sturge by politely refusing "Dumb Crambo" in the salon, and going to the Casino with the de Vertons that evening. "In white hats simply covered with expensive feathers," as that lady remarked to Mrs. Medlicott, who was deaf, but got a surprising amount of news through her ear-trumpet, and spread it abroad with unsurpassed rapidity.

The two girls, meanwhile, sat out upon the familiar terrace, looking over a sea spangled with starry lights in the yachts, and up at a sky where the clear radiance of the silver stars outshone them utterly. At high water there are few sights more charming than the emerald coast muffled in this cloak of jewelled darkness. Dainty Dinard looks more than ever like a coquette dressed for a ball in a radiant *parure* of gems. The little place is altogether artificial, and at night the

Casino might have been Aladdin's palace to untravelled Daisy, who watched with "sweet wonder in her eyes" the gay crowd passing to and from the stifling rooms where the stupid little horses attracted so many more devotees than the night or the music. For there was a Hungarian band playing, flinging its wonted touch of poetry into the merest trivialities, and a sort of longing passion into the very waltzes.

"Here, again, there are compensations for me," said Victor de Verton to Miranda, softly. "In this half-light I have no pity to endure, and the music carries me to fairyland. These waltzes, so full of fire and youth, they set the man who never was, dancing with a beautiful mystery he has never known, and learning something of the greatest mystery life holds. If I dared, I should like to ask of what you are thinking. Your face is so full of contentment."

"That is a secret, but not a romantic one," said Miranda, caught in the midst of a chapter of the famous novel. "I am one of those hard women who do not easily dream of themselves; and the great mystery, as you well call it, is just as much a mystery to me." She spoke so calmly that Victor could not but believe.

A woman in a gipsy dress now came forward and seated herself with a 'cello in front of the band. Presently she dashed into a tarantella so brilliant, so full of mirth, that it captivated her listeners into loud applause. When she repeated it, the other instruments joined, more as if to obey an irresistible impulse than to follow a pre-arranged programme. Even Madame de Verton paused in her talk with a grey-moustached and deferential cavalier to tap her ubiquitous fan in approbation.

Daisy's upturned face was lit with a bright expression of delight under the rosy Chinese lanterns. She never noticed that just then Herapath had gone past them into the baccarat rooms, where he had had an unlucky two hours. But he had lost no detail of the picture—the round white throat, the white arms half seen through black gauzy sleeves.

He was in no temper to tolerate "Tou-Tou" Deruche, who, noisy with champagne and success, had proclaimed the arrival of "a little Anglaise type *très jolie*" at St. Enogat, and had darkly hinted that he, "Tou-Tou," had cast a favouring eye upon the young person. "Married, I tell you, *mon vieux*, and Monsieur away. Within a week, I make you all the bet, she will be in my

automobile, enjoying a course with one less impenetrable than that ridiculous islander, too ordinary to perceive the fine quality of his pearl. Madame de Verton will present me. She loves me not, but for her fête she must have money, and the francs of 'Tou-Tou' are not to be had without full value. Bah ! the man who is rich may buy what he wants."

Hera path was in one of his frequent moods of disgust with things as they were, as he went out alone from the Casino and, lighting a cigar, walked slowly along to St. Enogat. He was weary of that connection with Dot Scott-Battersby, begun long ago in a lonely hill station ; angry with himself for not resolutely leaving the cards alone. If he got his appointment and was once back in India, he would turn over a new leaf. He could not take his wife ; no one could expect it. And if Dot could interest herself with a cad like that insufferable "Tou-Tou" Deruche, she would have to understand that she must say good-bye again to Mark Hera path.

A motor-car, driven at a furious pace, dashed by at this moment. "'Tou-Tou,' for a fiver. No one else would drive at such a breakneck speed. He has even succeeded in frightening a



French cab-horse, for here comes a carriage at something different from the usual crawl."

He could only guess that the driver was drunk, the terrified animal beyond his control. Agitated voices from within called for help in French and English, and, rushing to the horse's head, Herapath performed the rather difficult feat of forcing it to pull up before going down a steep bit of hill. Two girls sprang out, and the next moment Miranda Ricordan was thanking him, and the terrified, over-excited Daisy was sobbing, and dreadfully ashamed of herself for doing it.

"It is the usual thing—your man is drunk. The best plan is to leave him, and turn the horse's head towards its stables. The poor beast will know his way there, and I will see you to your hotel, unless you would rather I left the fellow in the ditch and drove you," said Herapath calmly.

"Oh, please not. I could not get in again. It was so dreadful. The motor went by like lightning, and nearly touched us."

Daisy's helplessness made its instant appeal to one who was all physical strength and moral weakness. Herapath could not keep a certain kind of resolution half an hour, though he

would have led a forlorn hope with the coolest valour. He had rescued more than one man in battle, but he had not shrunk from imperilling the soul of more than one woman. Fear was unknown to him, and no thought of possible consequences, whether for good or evil, ever kept him from following the impulse of the moment. He was a slave to these impulses he absurdly called fate.

To walk by the side of this pretty girl, who clearly thought him such a hero, and seemed mistakenly to imagine she owed him her life, was the beginning of a second chapter in his St. Enogat experiences, he knew perfectly well. That Miranda merely regarded him with reasonable gratitude, as having performed a timely service, only heightened his admiration of Daisy in tears. He did not care at all for courage in a woman. He preferred to be her protector after the old fashion, which had advantages, if she chanced to have caught his fancy. That he was a kind of knight-errant in Daisy's eyes restored the self-respect he had lost over the baccarat.

When they said good night at the villa, they both held out their hands, and he knew that he was once again playing the only game, except fighting, for which he cared. He did not ask

himself how many times he had played it before, or towards what unprofitable purpose he was veering now. Those awkward questions never disturbed him. He had a vague idea that what he considered his boyish quixotry in ending the mad fancy of an idle hour at the altar, and chaining himself for life to a woman socially beneath him, justified his seeking consolation, and he sought it.

“If I had only married the right woman, I should not have been what I am,” was a phrase he sometimes made dangerously effective when at last compelled to admit that he *was* married. There was a first stage before the supreme confidence, longer or shorter, according to the temperament of the subject. His listener always felt that she could have found happiness in leading so engaging a transgressor to repentance, and always decided, as he meant her to decide, that her influence was paramount. All women, even the best, love power over the heart of a man, and Herapath’s quite genuine modesty concerning those feats of arms of which he had reason to be proud, attractively concealed his very ignoble sentiment of enjoyment in sheer mischief-making.

## CHAPTER IV

### ST. BRIAC

“**A**ND mind, Francine, I forbid you to speak of this ridiculous inheritance in St. Briac,” was Miranda’s conclusion to a little lecture concerning Victor de Verton’s valet next morning.

“The Cousine Séraphine will have already spoken, Mademoiselle. She is one who never leaves a word for another to say. But I comprehend not the indiscretion of that chatterbox Jules, to repeat all I told him.”

“See that he has nothing more to repeat, and pack our bathing gowns,” concluded Miranda with emphasis.

“But assuredly the ladies will not wet those charming costumes in Briac, where there are but two or three to behold. Go rather to Dinard and exhibit them this first time. The aged mother has waited long ; let her wait a little longer. Go you with this Mademoiselle de la Rivière, who is herself so elegant.”



But Miranda had made up her mind to explore a little, and they walked up the village and waited, and finally lumbered slowly away through a flat green landscape, becoming broken and wilder after tiny, bustling St. Lunaire, all big hotel and little casino, had been left behind. Civilization has never devised anything uglier or more convenient than the steam tram, the poor man's motor; but the scenery looks just as lovely from its hideous open cars, and Miranda was in a mood that did not allow a hedge of waving golden-rod near a white villa to escape her, or a pleat in the brief plaid petticoats of the youthful Parisians of St. Lunaire, going shorewards with their shrimping nets in coquettish imitation of their mammas. The white-capped women stared as curiously at the tram as if it were a startling novelty, and not what they saw a dozen times a day. Visitors from Dinard were welcomed at intermediate stations as those from a far country, and good-byes became fervent as some bold adventurer was seen off to St. Briac by half a dozen friends, with a camera to record his experiences.

"Whatever happens, they talk about it at the tops of their voices, and if nothing happens they still talk," said Daisy. "I wish I understood

better what they say, for they seem to enjoy it all so much."

Miranda herself had been deep in conversation with an elderly nurse and a very smart little girl, dressed as a boy in picturesque red, with the rich colouring of a peach, and a pair of flashing black eyes under the dark curls.

"As for St. Briac, Madame, it is of a mortal sadness," she had explained. "Nothing but the English and the golf, and neither are gay. But Mademoiselle makes the visit to her uncle at the Villa Joyeuse once each week, though happily he permits her to sojourn at the Grand Hotel with friends."

Miranda was so accustomed not to be taken for an Englishwoman because she spoke French well, that she regarded the remark as a compliment instead of a rather dismal reflection on our national ignorance.

"And my uncle, though he cares not for the world, is a person the most celebrated. All the beautiful ladies of Dinard long to visit him, but he wills it not," put in the small maiden. "He loves well his Paulette. Imagine, Mesdames, he has a charming tent upon the shore, that I may bathe when I come. It is so savage at St. Briac there near the hotel; there are no *abines*."

"Then, what are we to do, I wonder? We have brought our dresses to bathe before lunch."

"Mesdames, the tent is there at your disposal. My uncle permits that I invite also my friends, but they will not often come. They like better the games on the Plage. All my acquaintance to-day make a hospital for the brave Russians hurt by the wicked Japanese. That is more amusing than to bathe in solitude. Ah, bah! Briac makes me a little melancholy. When I am in Dinard I reflect not that poor Papa is with the good saints, and that Maman is in America and has altogether forgotten Paulette."

The tram stopped near those breezy links, with their shabby little pavilion, which may soon be covered with flaunting villas, and only a beloved and thyme-scented memory to golfers. The big new hotel, in its gaunt squareness, faced a prospect of sea and sky dazzling in every tone of blue. The tempting, sparkling waves were hurrying into a little silver bay of fine sand, set between black rocks hung with wet olive seaweeds, gemmed with shining pools where sea-anemones played at being flowers. The beach was almost deserted, and the tent, with a French flag flying, was pitched on the sandy edge, where the dim

green grasses might have won the hearts of the Dutch dune painters of Katwyck.

"Make your toilettes, I beg you, Mesdames," said Paulette, graciously waving her protégées to her tent.

"But later, my angel, you will be brave and enter the sea without weeping," said the stout nurse persuasively.

"It may be," answered Paulette guardedly. "But it is not worth while to bathe here, where no one regards, for one who has a costume from Paris."

Five minutes later, Daisy, in red, and Miranda, in powder blue, ran lightly over the hot sands. They flung their cloaks upon the rocks, and swam out, for the tide was coming in fast, and they were in clear, deep water directly. There are few pleasures in the world better than the first delicious plunge in a sea warmed by the gracious heat of summer. Miranda, turning to float, wondered if the very gulls could be happier, as she watched them wheeling high in the golden air.

She had the faculty of living every moment to its full value, of which half the world knows nothing at all. She had no thought of a hard-working past, no uncomfortable fears for the



future. This little, cheap, commonplace holiday had already been so rich to her in new experiences, and just to lie still, scarcely rocked by the tiny waves, was ecstasy. Fleet Street and the flat in Chelsea were in another world. She did not even want Dinard, with its chatter and its gaiety. This still shore of Briac, half asleep in the nearing noonday, made an intimate and sweet appeal to her.

Daisy Mostyn did not know what love of nature meant, and had no idea of her own ignorance ; but with Miranda it was a strong, dominant emotion. She was at home and happy in congenial society. Yet this—this was more exquisite, to float alone on a sea of limpid sapphire beside a coast of emerald. Daisy was a weak and timid swimmer, and she left her far behind as, with a strong, rapid stroke, she swam out to a tiny rocky islet, and scrambled up to rest awhile.

“ But for the great matchbox of an hotel, the place would be a poem,” she thought, stretching out her bare feet luxuriously to the sunbeams. “ ‘The Forsaken Merman’ might have come here to listen to the church bells.” Then, feeling that the back of her hair was wet, she took off the becoming blue cap, and let it stream over

her shoulders to dry in long ripples, the colour of the sunshine itself. She thought with a detached, comfortable pity of George Everard Stokes, tidy and busy, and contrasted her other self with this blissful idler on an enchanted island—a Miranda without a Ferdinand or a thought of one.

She had a fresh, sweet voice, and had sung since she could speak, catching up every melody she heard, and, as a child, setting them often to meaningless words of her own or rhymes beloved by her. It was natural to think of the fairies of the sea to-day, and she remembered how, as a little girl, she had dipped valiantly for the sake of the Tennyson mermaid, fancying herself meeting her, and touching her own curls with that comb of pearl. A song of the old, old story of a rash fisherman lured by a siren voice to death and destruction came to her lips :—

“ Sur le rivage aride et solitaire  
C’était un jour un jeune et beau pêcheur.”

In still weather music carries far across calm waters, and quite at a distance every syllable came clearly to the ear of a man alone in a small white canoe—a man of five-and-forty, tall and dark, with a pointed brown beard, and a pair of deep-

set blue eyes looking out upon the summer sea without a ray of delight in its loveliness.

“‘*Le rivage aride et solitaire*,’ that is my life,” was the pitiful conclusion to the thoughts of Maurice Préval, the idol just now of literary France, rich, successful, and free. He could have said with English Henley, “Fame’s a pearl that lies beneath a sea of tears,” and at this moment he would even have flung the pearl back to its home in the dim water-world just to have grasped a little happiness before the chill of age touched his thick hair with its white hand.

“*Viens, partager le bonheur.*”

The song crossed the distance between Préval and the unseen singer with a thrilling expression in the full notes. It seemed like a direct summons, and roused him in spite of himself, bringing a flicker of interest into the set face that, for all its distinction, was not handsome, and bore the impress of conflict with harsh circumstance rather than the reflection of success. Time and place gave the simple air a sort of magic. “*Viens.*” The world called Préval a cynic, but the few who knew better saw the poet look out from behind the mask of comedy, and perceived the man himself as

he was, very lonely, with as much pity for the pain of the world as scorn for its hollowness and its shams.

The Breton in him stirred as he listened, and the sea-legends crowded back to his remembrance, an airy company of sweet false faces and soft music. He moved nearer to the place whence the sound seemed to come, and presently he watched, quite unobserved, a tall girl upon a little purple island, knotting up a mass of glittering hair, singing as she deftly moved her bare arms about their pretty task. Presently the hair was all hidden, and the singer dived into the sea and swam rapidly towards the shore, the blue cap just visible above the liquid blue.

The splash of the water was succeeded by silence, and Préval moved slowly back to a nearer landing-place to Villa Joyeuse, with an artist's pleasure in the little picture.

Needless to say, Francine had given an imposing account of her ladies to the nurse of Paulette. Compelled to leave out the rich uncle with the fortune, she had made amends by turning Daisy Mostyn's country home into a château of noble proportions, and representing Miranda as a leader of fashion in a London of unmatched gorgeousness. Paulette had made her



usual firm refusal to bathe, and had eagerly listened to every word as she constructed a neat table of sand, appetisingly set out with dishes garnished with green seaweed.

Thus it befell that Maurice Préval had all these details to enliven his tête-à-tête lunch with his niece, which both enjoyed equally.

"After all, my uncle, these English are not so detestable," Paulette had decided kindly, as she sat with a napkin about her neck, partaking freely of mayonnaise of lobster. "The ladies gave me chocolate and many thanks, and the one spoke French as we others, and wore a costume with a cachet worthy of Dinard, blue, with entredeux of lace, and a little bonnet with a ravishing bow."

So the mermaid was English. Préval was instantly irritated to think he had not guessed it. His prejudice was very strong, founded on a series of stupid, uncomprehending criticisms of his books, and such incessant meetings with the wrong people on his travels that he had sternly refused to meet the right ones when in London.

"And Madame de Verton wills that I should be a fairy in her tableaux for the poor fishermen who were drowned," continued Paulette. "It is sad for their wives, but rather gay for Dinard to have such a fête in consequence. And she asks

that you will give me the little robe and the ornaments. Clarisse, and Fi-Fi, and Camille will also be fairies. You will see to it that I am the most beautiful ; I know it well."

Paulette flung her arms round her uncle's neck, with a sparkling glance from beneath curling lashes, causing him to sigh as well as smile.

He caressed her soft hair, and asked, "Will you give me a curl for all these things, my Paulette?"

"Willingly, but you must cut it here," and she put a small brown hand, with two preposterous minute rings upon it, to the back of her head.

"No, no ; this is my curl ;" and Préval ran his finger through the one tied jauntily in front with a knot of crimson ribbon.

"Impossible, my uncle. It is so very pretty, and I have already refused it to all those Messieurs on the Plage, even to Monsieur 'Tou-Tou' Deruche, whom the ladies adore as, they tell me for ever, they adore you also. Won't you leave this *triste* villa, and come and see what a success you will have at Dinard? I long to present you to Fi-Fi. She has but six years, but is almost as wise as I, who have seven. And Monsieur Victor is come to St. Enogat, very

suffering, very pale, and with a little golden heart from London for Paulette. The fogs of that terrible England have, perhaps, made him ill. One tells me that in London the lamps burn at midday. Let the *omelette aux abricots* return. I will have more of them. And take me by-and-by to the church, that I may pray that our dear Monsieur does not die too soon. In Dinard one is in the world ; one has no time for prayer. Here I recall always poor Papa."

Daisy and Miranda had lunched at the hotel, but not till very late. For as they crossed the green dunes, covered with linen bleaching in the dry, sweet air, there had been a shrill cry of rapture, and Francine had suddenly disappeared into the arms of a very little old stout woman. "It is the little mother," she had gasped, and the two talked and laughed so simultaneously that how they understood each other was a mystery. Next came the presentation by the proud Francine. "Mama has one ear a little idle," she shouted above a cataract of compliments and gratitude poured forth by the little mother, who, if she did not always hear, made amends by never being silent. Miranda had her little speech of commendation of Francine ready for the first comma, and accompanied it with a ten-franc

piece, at which magnificent bounty the crowd almost applauded aloud.

"And I will pray the good saints to send you a good husband, worthy of one so charming," was the end of the long tirade as regarded Miranda; "and to Madame many more babies, and all as beautiful as herself."

Daisy had laughed heartily as soon as they were out of sight, and Francine had been given leave of absence. "It was like an act in a comic opera, all those washerwomen standing listening to every word, and the funny old thing kissing your hand as gracefully as if she had been a duchess. Hark! Now the duet has become a chorus, and Francine is leading it as first soprano."

The big, cool rooms made them almost incline to wish themselves permanently at St. Briac. Then they loitered back to the beach under the shadow of a great rock, until it was time to bring out the tea-basket.

"We will walk up and see the village and the church," said Miranda, who never minded heat and was always energetic; but Daisy insisted upon being left behind, to fall asleep presently in the grateful shade like a tired child. Their friendship was of that rare, comfortable sort which is quite unexacting. They each followed



their own inclinations, and Miranda enjoyed passing the famous old mossy mill a hundred artists paint every summer much more than if she had had a tired companion, not very capable of appreciating the charms those artists discover. The village is neither poor nor very picturesque, and the children look healthy and rosy. Busy, animated women everywhere in speckless white coiffes, but scarcely a man to be seen ; for it was high summer, and the fisher-folk far away.

Near the church a large empty open carriage was waiting in such shade as the driver could find. Miranda opened the door softly and passed into the dusky gloom, with its faint suggestion of burnt incense clinging about the cool atmosphere, and mingling with the fresher perfume of white lilies. In Brittany all the churches are clean, all the people devout, if travellers may be believed.

Miranda sat down, and a brooding sense of peace fell upon her spirit—some vague, unspoken thanksgiving for youth and health and holiday, too subtle to find words. She looked around her from her corner behind a pillar, and saw in the tiny Lady Chapel the chair of Victor de Verton drawn up near its altar. The fresh lilies on the steps were evidently his gifts, and

Miranda was almost awed at the expression of exaltation in the pale face. His eyes were fixed upon the figure of the Madonna, and where she could see but tawdry decorations and poorest realisation of the "blessed among women," she knew that he was in the very presence of a sweet consoler, listening and understanding the story of his martyrdom.

But she had no idea that this was the calm of victory after one of those terrible conflicts unguessed at by any human friend. Sometimes this man was assailed by that grim temptation, born of sharp physical torture, to end the struggle by his own hand, in the long nights, when, awake and suffering, the thought of an endless sleep made such an insistent appeal. Once again he had triumphed, once again he had found balm in Gilead, and the scent of the lilies was as a breath from Paradise, where spirits purified by pain walked in white raiment.

Miranda moved back even farther into the shadow, with a sharp sense of suffering and of compassion. There were tears in her eyes and a great tenderness in her heart. All the beauty of the summer hours, all the joy in life, seemed but to intensify her silent pity. "If he could but know what I feel, it might comfort him,"

she thought ; yet a strange fear of being misunderstood kept her still in her dusky place.

Presently the door swung open again, and for an instant a broad golden shaft of sunshine fell across the grey pavement. She saw her little friend of the tent enter, and, raising herself on tiptoe, dip her finger in the holy water, and make the sign of the cross, first upon the breast of the tall man who smiled down at her, and then upon her own.

Paulette held a great bunch of wild flowers, poppies, blue bugloss and yellow snapdragon ; she passed like a bright little incarnation of July itself along the dim aisles, saying audibly, " See, there is Monsieur Victor, who prays already. I will pray beside him. He is almost a saint, Susanne says, and I may be heard the more surely where the saints are assembled to listen."

Neither the child nor her companion noticed her, but Miranda felt that the face of this man arrested her attention, compelled her interest. Had she ever seen him ? The next moment her unspoken question was answered.

De Verton turned quickly and said, half under his breath, in a tone of eager welcome, " Ah, my dear Préval, how good it is for friends to meet here."

"It is a pity to call you down from Paradise just to touch the hand of one who cannot take you back there."

"But I will give all my flowers to Notre Dame, and she will care for you," whispered Paulette. "I do not want to go to heaven if my Uncle Maurice comes not also."

The men were silent as the child knelt. Prével stood beside the chair, and Miranda watched him, wondering. So this was the greatest living novelist, whose name was a synonym for success, whose every book surpassed its predecessor. She had imagined him brilliant, faultless in dress, with the scornful expression of Dulac's famous portrait. That portrait was much handsomer than this original, looking so tired, and wearing his giant's robe with no air of pride at all.

She had expected a genius, and was amused at her own vain imaginings that a genius would be somehow other than a man. This one, in dark blue serge, like a sailor, was so very ordinary after all. The Prével of her imagination would not have loved a child or been kind to a cripple; yet, with a woman's want of logic, she was disappointed that he had no existence.

She ran over the books in review. *Monte Carlo*, that wonderful picture, more like a drama,



with living men and women, than a novel. *L'Ecrivain*, with its animadversions against his own profession, and that irresistible hero she had fancied the author himself. *Roses-Trémières*, with its mordant satire on the blasé Parisians going back to play at being country folks, its merciless analysis of the dull horror of a loveless marriage. And then *Perfides*, with its sharp arrows aimed at the heart of woman. What harm had the English done Maurice Préval, that he should have expended all the force of his attack upon them in that last triumph?

How much he had achieved! whilst she had done nothing. The poor little articles, read but to be forgotten, seemed despicable; even the novel that was to be, hopeless beside all this wonderful craftsmanship, this deep knowledge of human nature; her own ignorance deplorable, set beside all this work done with such a cruel perfection. A sense of weakness swept over her with a cold chill of discouragement. The ladder of fame was so lofty as she stood upon its lowest step and looked upwards. For the first time came the realization of the limitations of her own power. The quite lowly task of cheering a handful of readers by the work she did with

such an honest purpose, looked so mean beside Préval's splendid successes.

The most jealous critic was compelled to praise him or to be silent—two courses hateful to those who envy. Miranda was not envious ; only to meekly acknowledge that there, in this village church, stood such a master of the art she longed to make her own more fully, brought a wistful sense that she was only a woman, after all, struggling for the expression of thoughts and ideas perhaps not very new or worth all this anxious preoccupation.

Happily, Préval stood between her and the chair, otherwise perhaps de Verton might have made her known to him in that natural mistaken idea that such an introduction could not but be prized as a privilege. She slipped out very quietly, and, once again in the hot, dazzling light, felt a sense of irritation at this rough disturbance of her peaceful mood. Truly there was no getting away from the "Perfides." They haunted her like a pair of persistent ghosts. How foolish she had been to consent to appear in the tableaux ! The idea was altogether absurd.

Now that she had seen St. Briac, she would not come to it again—at least, not for a long time. But as she went back to the beach, the

loveliness of the little bay reproached her for that decision, and her own tiny island came back to her remembrance as if it had years instead of moments of charming association. Why should Préval, great as he was, drive her away? No; he should not deprive her of the enjoyment even of the yellow horned poppies glittering among the coarse grasses.

Daisy was seated in the same shady place, but not alone, for Mark Herapath was standing beside her, smoking a cigarette with his usual complete air of ease.

"Good afternoon, Miss Ricordan. I have been golfing here, and was just taking a stroll before catching the tram when I met Mrs. Mostyn."

He did not say that this had happened an hour ago, nor did he explain that he had found Daisy asleep, and said all the obvious things about the sleeping beauty when the sound of his footsteps had roused her. She was such a fresh little thing, and had looked so pretty when she opened her startled blue eyes and put up anxious hands to the ruffled hair above her flushed cheeks.

To her the hour had been altogether delightful. The familiar type to which Herapath so

emphatically belonged was quite new to her. The stale platitudes of compliment struck her as evidences of an amazing cleverness. She was not an enthusiastic novel reader, or else she might have perceived that there was nothing in Herapath to differentiate him from a hundred conventional heroes of fiction.

It was not even his good looks and the unmistakable bearing of a gallant soldier and gentleman ; it was the old, old trick of making her feel herself a charming woman instead of a shy country girl, by that soft deference of voice and look. "Snow Queen," he had said, as she shyly told him of what she regarded as so great an honour. "I think you would scarcely remain that to your friends." There was nothing in the short sentence except the inflection and the look with which the last word had been spoken. But both had their effect.



## CHAPTER V

### DINARD

**I**T is so much the fashion to seem busy in a hurried age that even those whose lives are not occupied by honest work crowd their days with trifles, until their friendships, their very loves, are jostled aside. That is why the halcyon summer holidays, with inevitable intervals of real leisure, consist largely for many men and most women of "some emotions and a moral." We have time to observe our fellow-creatures, time at last to get a little nearer to each other.

Ten sunny days had slipped away since the afternoon at St. Briac which both Miranda and Daisy privately regarded as memorable for reasons undefined. They had unwillingly made almost an enemy of Mrs. Sturge, and very willingly a firm friend of Madame de Verton. Miranda now had a bevy of French acquaintances to whom it was sweet to her to be known only as the daughter of the painter of "Pity."

She had stood independently upon the merits of George Everard Stokes for so long that it made her feel curiously young to be resting on the older, dearer claim to distinction.

Daisy was greatly admired, and was popular, but rather speechless, among them all. Her French was scanty enough to be practically only a valid excuse for Herapath to linger beside her. Their use of English in that cheerful, lively group isolated them, as Herapath intended it should. He was more and more charmed with this little fresh country flower, further and further from understanding that Daisy had no comprehension of any such possibilities as to him seemed now inevitable. She had listened to the story of his marriage, and found it far more thrilling and interesting than any written novel. Herapath had an attractive voice, and had lowered it then to a telling tone of intimate confidence.

It was so new and unusual for Daisy to be in this fascinating position of guide, philosopher, and friend, least of all to such a handsome hero as this. She thought it so noble of him to have married the wretched woman who had spoilt his life, that she quite forgot that his misfortune was due merely to his own weakness in the first

instance. He went over the old ground, familiar to Dot Scott-Battersby and so many others of her kind, and found an irresistible novelty in Daisy's sympathy, just because it was so shyly offered.

He was a favourite with Madame de Verton because of his chivalrous kindness to Victor, and had been readily offered a part in the tableaux, for which an indefatigable committee, French, English, and American, had worked ceaselessly. All the tickets were sold, and numbers of people desperately injured because they or their daughters had not been invited to show themselves in those effective frames. The amount of jealousy the whole affair had caused was in the usual disproportion to any sane reason for it. Mrs. Sturge and Mrs. Medlicott had tried in vain to induce the Beau Séjour in general to stay at home, and were so irritated to find they had no influence upon those who could afford ten francs for places that the animadversions of those who had not failed to satisfy them.

Archie Mostyn's permission had come by return post, but it had not been at all what Daisy had expected. "The papers I send regularly will show you I am not doing badly in the matches," it characteristically began. "Of

course, I do want you to have a first-rate time. As long as you are not in any scenes with French Johnnies, act as much as ever you like, and show these folks they haven't got all the good looks their way."

Miranda had been amused when told of this by a surprised Daisy with an uncomfortable consciousness that she ought to have studied those same cricket reports more carefully.

"Don't you see he is a little jealous, Daisy, and that it is rather nice of him?" she had explained.

"Well, perhaps it is ; but I never thought he would have bothered so much about me when he was playing for the county."

There had been more correspondence before Daisy had accepted her place in what was expected to be one of a pair of most successful pictures. It resulted in a post-card hurriedly scribbled in pencil : "Please tell Major Herapath I should like to shake hands with him myself. I've met Arbuthnot, and I feel quite proud to think of you giving a flag, or whatever it is, to such a good fighter."

The eventful day had arrived, and the exhausting, disappointing dress-rehearsal had taken place the night before. All the time-honoured



difficulties inseparable from charitable entertainments had duly been overcome, and the final morning, very hot and still, was like the calm after the storm. There had been a few purchases to be made in Dinard, and they had afterwards gone to sit upon the Plage, dotted with many-coloured parasols and gay with animated voices.

The vulgarity and noise of our English watering-places cannot but shock the French pleasure-seeker. To imagine Etretat, of the rock arches, or dainty Dinard, overrun with niggers, open-air preachers, and masked singers with distressful harmoniums, is to picture all the bright charm vanished. The band playing dance music at the American bar below the Casino was scarcely to be heard near the water, where the bathers, much less elegant than they are described in enthusiastic French newspapers, and often of most solid proportions, were disporting themselves with an eye to effect; for the Frenchwoman seldom despairs of admiration, and the Frenchman never.

Victor de Verton's chair had been wheeled where he could watch Paulette assisting her admirers to defend a fort against Japanese invaders. "Jeanne d'Arc fought better than the men, and why not I?" had been her warlike

announcement of a temporary alliance with the boys eager to welcome her.

She and Miranda were fast friends, and she had come up to her with a ready kiss. "You will not bathe and disarrange your coiffure for the soirée ; I neither." Paulette's excuses for avoiding the sea were many and various, but always successful.

"Imagine, Mademoiselle, I went yesterday to St. Briac, where indeed it is so dull that you are wise to come no more—such a pretty toilette as that mauve, which is so flattering to you, would be wasted—and I could not make the Uncle Maurice promise to come and see even me. He said but 'Perhaps,' and I know well that means he wills it not."

As she ran off, Victor de Verton smiled. "So you see your dislike to being beheld as Alice by the author will not have to be experienced. But I am sorry for my aunt. The apparition of Maurice was to have been the *clou* of it all. In Paris he is forced to go into the world every night to study his only book, the *comédie humaine*. At St. Briac he plays the hermit-crab, and it would have been a triumph to bring him out of his shell."

At this moment Herapath strolled over the

sands towards them, passing Mrs. Scott-Battersby with a cool bow, as that lady, in an amazing green gown, chattered loudly with "Tou-Tou" Deruche, thin and ugly in his bathing cloak, as he squatted at her feet smoking a cigarette. He spoke to Miranda and looked at Daisy as he held out two or three letters.

"The post came in, and I thought you might both want your mail. May I be rewarded for my energy by leave to occupy Ma'mselle Paulette's abandoned fort under the shade of the chair-umbrella? I hear the last ticket is gone, in spite of Mrs. Sturge's despairing opinion of the characters of those who are going to figure on the stage. Also that, as she has had one given her, she is going after all, because she feels it would be so unkind to refuse it."

Miranda had moved her frilled sunshade so that it hid her face, and had opened her letter with a surprise that was almost agitation. It was from Fraser Micklethwaite, and for a moment Beaulieu Street, close and dirty, in its summer unloveliness, blotted out the beach and the sea, and silenced all the merry sounds of childish laughter. It was not a very long letter, and it seemed to her as curiously unlike its writer as letters are apt to prove.

"I feel I left you with the false impression that it was the writer, not the woman, for whom I cared. Since you went away, I have seen you standing there in your lavender dress a thousand times. If ever a day comes when you feel you want a strong arm to shield you, a heart to love you, remember I do not change easily, and that I am still there, still hoping."

It was very beautiful that he should love her like this. And how strange that it should only arouse a vague, half-admiring, half-compassionate regret. She found herself comparing this determined Scotchman with another man she only knew by his books. How different was Maurice Préval, she thought, without any idea of something stirring deeply in her own heart, prompting that incongruous contrast. She had not seen him since the day at St. Briac, and now, surely, it could be only relief she felt that he would not be present to see Alice looking mockingly out of her golden frame.

The Snow Queen had been abandoned, partly because it had been decided that only blonde fairies would be suitable. Miranda had suggested Titania, asleep, with her attendants, and thus given scope for a marvellous little yellow frock for Paulette as Mustard-seed, with the faithful



Fi-Fi in faint pink as Pease-blossom. There was to be music to illustrate the tableaux, and Miranda was herself to sing behind the scenes, "I know a bank whereon the wild thyme blows." Just the requisite verse had to be arranged as a solo. "And the whole is a charming compliment to Shakespeare, and therefore to England. It will show we do not confine our homage to French genius alone," Madame de Verton had commented, leaving her hearers with the inference that she kindly desired to place Shakespeare on a level with Prével.

Daisy's share of the post was a small parcel, and Herapath bent forward to proffer a knife to cut the string, and to seize his chance to whisper, "You look charming this morning, Mrs. Archie, and Titania will be the hit of the night."

That Daisy always had a pretty blush for the smallest compliment gave Herapath quite a new pleasure in saying the obvious thing. There was absolutely nothing original about him. He followed straight along the beaten track, and the wonder of it was that he never had any difficulty in finding a woman to accompany him, though most of them, unlike Daisy, knew the well-worn way so intimately.

But before the flush had faded, two rivals in-

tervened. The parcel contained the portrait of a pair of plump baby boys of one and three years respectively. They were not remarkable for beauty, except in one pair of eyes. Daisy, wholly forgetting Herapath, who was holding her pink sunshade, kissed the little picture, and then looked up half ashamed.

"How silly you will think me! But it is a surprise from my mother-in-law, and they *are* such dears."

"Jolly little beggars, and awfully lucky," said Herapath, with a sentimental emphasis utterly wasted. Daisy enjoyed admiration, but she had no idea to what lengths Herapath's "friends" usually went without much urging.

"Tou-Tou" Deruche had lost his bet hopelessly, though he had bought his introduction from Madame de Verton at a high figure. For Daisy had no fancy for the decadent in modern manhood, and the all-conquering "Tou-Tou" had accentuated her insular prejudice against Frenchmen as a class, especially as his amazing English was even worse than her own French.

"How I want to see my little men!" she had sighed, unreasonably reflecting that, if they were so very happy, they might learn to love their grandmamma best. She was silent, and Herapath

thought how pretty she looked under the rosy shadow of the sunshade ; but she was longing for a pair of little fat arms clasped round her neck, feeling for the first time a positive pain of home-sickness, and quite forgetting everything else for the moment.

Presently she assented to his proposal that they should take a stroll, leaving Miranda beside the chair. For Herapath's only pleasure in conversation was when it took the form of a tête-à-tête with some one he thought good-looking.

There was a softened expression in Miranda's face as she put the letter in her pocket and turned to Victor de Verton, whose gratitude for her company always touched her deeply. She could not guess what an especial meaning her friendship held to him because he loved to recall that kindly night when she had first given it without the inevitable pity, the inevitable physical shrinking.

"You have had good news, Mademoiselle?" he asked, when they were alone.

"Yes, and no. Letters are seldom quite satisfactory."

"It is the same with me, for Préval has sent me a line, with a cheque for my good aunt, and it means that he will not come. I think he fears

because my aunt is so busy as to the marriage of Yvonne. My cousin is all that is good and amiable, but it is not enough for Maurice, even if he could forget; and that, I believe, is not always easy for such as he."

"But I thought he was married. In England they say he is separated from his wife—that he was very cruel to her." The words came almost before Miranda knew it, but she regretted them as quickly.

"It is terrible how, even in your country, the Press lies. Maurice has never married, and for a reason which should win him respect, not calumny. When he first came to Paris, young and hopeful and so poor, he loved the beautiful wife of an old man, who coquetted with the brilliant boy as such women will, and told him always to wait, wait. Though she had lived all her life in France, she was English, and she made Maurice promise never to read the books she wrote, that he might love her for herself alone. But it was because they were horrible, those books, with her real evil nature peeping between the lines. He kept that promise loyally; and when does a man in love heed the warnings of his friends? Then, when he had waited faithful years, when she at last was free, she used



her freedom to gain riches and to marry a millionaire. Maurice had made his first great success, but the money came later.

"It has seemed his fate only to meet what is false in woman, for his brother, dead now of consumption, dragged away from his work on the very threshold of great scientific discoveries, had a lovely wife, the mother of Paulette. She, too, fell in love with wealth, as so many modern women do, and deserted him, and went to America with one who had a great fortune. Maurice himself is rich now, but I think these are the *perfides* who have spoilt his life. He seems to have no faith left. In vain I tell him of the goodness shown to me ; he cannot believe in it. 'The poor may perhaps love each other virtuously, but the other women care but for money, money, money,' he insists.

"When his brother died, with his false wife's name, Célestine, ever on his lips, praying in his delirium that she would come and stand beside him, and put her soft hand in his that was so burning, Maurice was with him, powerless to comfort him, and may be forgiven for hardening his heart. They were both writers of a certain talent. Célestine had a grace and wit which made her *Contes d'un Marquis* popular at once.

But as with their hearts, so with their talents, it was all for gain.

“Maurice had ideals when he came to Paris from his Breton home. He had listened to the sea and the winds, he had heard the music of the very shells upon the shore ; he had known the lives of the lowly peasants, often so grand in their simplicity. His first tales were such exquisite idylls. Ah, those he will not now reprint at all, because he says they are not true to nature, with their sea-scent and their poetry. But they are full of the truth and honour and faith of youth. When I perceived the scorn and bitterness of *Perfides*, and knew that there was no feigning in one single line, I prayed that Heaven might graciously send some one to bring back the dew and freshness of the morning.

“I pity my famous friend, with all his laurels. For, poor deformity as I am, I am richer than he, for I believe with all my soul in a merciful God, and in the goodness of humanity. Perhaps because I know I am not distant from the other world, this one looks very beautiful in my eyes. Sitting here, I can enjoy the golden colour of the sands, the sunshine, and—let me say it also—the light upon the golden hair of one who listens

so patiently. The laughter of the children at their play, the green cliffs, the echo of the gay music coming every now and then towards us—from all this I am not debarred.

“It may be that I am placed here to serve my purpose, to make some who might forget remember to thank the kind saints for health and strength. That is the thought of your Dickens, that great, splendid one with so much compassion and such a starry genius. Maurice is so lonely there at Briac, with no company but his own thoughts. He is at work, and refuses to speak of it, as always, but he has said to me, ‘Of what can one write except the emptiness, the decadence of these wretched days in which we live? Well did Thackeray speak of Society as *Vanity Fair*. I love not the English, but to their dead giants I do reverence.’”

“And does Monsieur Préval speak our language?” Miranda asked the question almost shyly.

“Never now, because *she* taught him; but he still reads it. Like Sainte-Beuve, he thinks the English poetry the noblest of all. Shelley he especially adores, and others again. Only the last time at St. Briac I said to him, ‘My friend, have you then no access to fairy-

land, when I find the way there so easy? The perfumed velvet of a crimson rose, the voice of the sea, the smile of a lovely child, the colouring of a great picture—all these things take me away from my miserable self to a world where I am a king.' And Maurice smiled, and for a moment he was the Maurice of old days. As a friend he is wonderful, and my friendship with him is my pride. He will leave the most celebrated men, the most charming women, to sit alone with me and cheer me in the hard hours when the pain is almost unendurable. 'Ah, Victor, I should like to go with you, but my path lies on a dustier high-road. Only sometimes—sometimes Shakespeare leads me there still. I have been in the forest of Arden and on that magic island of Prospero; I have dreamt at midsummer with Titania and with Oberon.' That was his answer; and I tell you these things, Mademoiselle, because I do not want Maurice to be judged always by his achievement. He is better than his books, with all their cleverness and grace. It is the hard fate of authors to be always associated with their writings."

Miranda looked out silently at the summer sea, and the little boats, with their flapping sails, like a flock of white butterflies. With Fraser



Micklethwaite's letter in her hand, she had forgotten it and him, and was thinking deeply of this sharp, ever-present contrast between the man and his work. She, Miranda Ricordan, had so easily slipped away from George Stokes, with the tiny reputation that was yet growing steadily. It came over her strongly, irresistibly, that it was better to be a sweet, womanly woman than to be famous, after all. It seemed almost unfair that she should have heard the secret history of the heart of Maurice Préval. Yet she could not forgive him for using it to make literature. If a day came when they were no longer strangers, she would know so much, he nothing. Society is so like a masked ball where no one is supposed to recognize a fellow-guest, and, after all, some person behind the scenes may have given away the secret.

"Maurice is naturally prejudiced against the English, and you are so generous you would even forgive him, knowing the reason."

"I would forgive him, certainly, if my forgiveness mattered to him, which is of all things the unlikeliest. If he hates the English and I resent *Perfidies*, we are best apart. I think I could never quite trust or respect a man who uses his own life for copy, and sells the reminiscences of

love affairs, prettily dressed up by a flattering imagination, at so much a thousand words!" Miranda exaggerated, as even the most reasonable women are apt to do. She liked *Perfides* less than ever by the light of what she could now read between the lines.

"Yet I greatly wish you two could meet," continued de Verton. "I have something to tell to him I dread to say myself, and a discreet messenger of such kindness as yours to me, would be precious indeed. When your good doctors in London told me all they could do would be useless, they told me something more. That the end is quite near—perhaps only a few weeks."

"Oh, do not say it!"

Miranda's eyes were full of tears as she interrupted.

"Dear Mademoiselle, do not be sad for me. Have you never thought that prisoners loosed from their chains, with no torture-chamber to fear again, have gone out very gladly to meet death and peace at last? I have always been a prisoner in chains, and—I am not afraid. These few days I have known you have been very happy. I am like Cyrano when he comforted himself with the thought that the frou-frou of

a woman's dress had, after all, rustled softly through his life for one moment."

"Not for a moment—for always. I shall never forget you, Monsieur Victor."

"And if I had been a man like the rest, you could say nothing sweeter to me."

One hot tear splashed down upon Miranda's white veil. She wiped it away hurriedly, and looked again at the bright scene in which, all incongruously, the solemn thought of nearing death had intruded. The line of fantastically dressed children paddling at the rippling edge of the tiny waves, the grotesque figure of a stout bather taking a swimming lesson, with a proportionately large life-belt, in a few inches of water, all seemed bizarre and unreal.

To Victor that tear was a tender consolation, and he spoke again serenely. "Maurice cannot endure it when I warn him my life will not be long. Strange as it may seem, he clings to me. Even the weeks and days may be numbered now, and I am resolved to enjoy all the beauty and happiness about me to the last. To call this radiant world a wilderness is not my religion. And if the valley of the shadow is dark, there will be stars to guide me even down its dim pathway, as surely as the star in the East shone upon

the wise men and led them to the cradle at Bethlehem. Others may doubt, but to us who have grasped the cross a strong assurance comes."

Victor de Verton spoke as no Englishman would ever speak, with an absolute unreserve. There was exaltation in his pale face and conviction in his low, clear voice. Miranda had no words; only the thought that this distorted hero of harsh reality was more a hero than all her best imaginings. She longed to say something, but sat tongue-tied, forgetting that her tears had spoken for her eloquently.

Paulette's noisy interruption was almost welcome. "The wicked Russians have gone home to déjeuner, and Fi-Fi and I go also," she began. "We must repose well before the evening, when we shall be the most beautiful of fairies. Monsieur Deruche has said to Madame there with the green toilette that she should have been queen, but we desire not such an ancient queen, Fi-Fi and I. Camille has wept because my costume is the more splendid, and wept more when I said that her tears would make her ugly. Yet it is the truth. Have you remarked the bathers? Bah! they have not much *chic* this morning, and one has said that no one swims like the blonde Anglaise. They talk enormously here at Dinard,



but not of the great secret of the silk book and the pictures. Actually it is unknown. I—I do not repeat all that is told in the salons, as does Camille.”

Madame de Verton now made her appearance, rustling breathlessly from the Casino theatre. “Madame Mostyn, Mademoiselle Ricordan, have you no remembrance of your complexions and my pictures, that you linger here to ruin both in this sun? We have the large carriage, and we will return to St. Enogat together. A little cutlet will not be amiss. What a day of agitations! The hat of Madame Battersby incomplete, the crown of Titania but this instant arrived; and in the midst—Heaven be thanked!—a demand of marriage for the hand of Yvonne.”

“Monsieur de Castel?” questioned Victor.

“The same. He is rich and of a good race. He writes a letter of the utmost elegance. Felicitate me, dear ladies.”

Daisy had joined them alone, and listened with the keen interest women always have in any kind of prospective wedding.

“But he is rather old, rather stout; and then, a widower with two sons. What does Yvonne say to all that?” Victor could see the reverse

of the medal, absolutely invisible to Madame de Verton.

"Yvonne is a girl of sense, with no vocation for the convent. Except the lawn-tennis, her talents are not remarkable. She is twenty-five, and I have done my best; but without a *dot* it is few who can be so imprudent. I brought her here as one had said this atrocious young Deruche was rich and champion of this game, but I found him, as of rule, absorbed with his grandmamas. That Madame Battersby will not again see fifty years. But it is well, for 'Tou-Tou' is a true horror, and Monsieur de Castel my excellent friend. He will arrive shortly. The autumn is such a suitable moment for an alliance. A trousseau before the dressmakers can even prophesy the winter modes is a true disaster. One might ruin one's self, and then buy furs absolutely of last year."

"That will be news for Camille," remarked Paulette complacently. "She announced that her maman believed that Ma'mselle Yvonne would be a *vieille fille*, and said there were none such in her family. I told her not to be impatient, for that no *mari* would want one who cries ever."

## CHAPTER VI

### TABLEAUX VIVANTS

THERE were six unnecessary candles blazing in Daisy Mostyn's little bedroom, where Francine, Miranda, and Madame de Verton's maid were engaged in dressing Titania. Archie's cheques and French taste in combination had wrought wonders, and Daisy's sometimes doubtful good looks had to-night blossomed into an undeniable if transient loveliness. She could hardly believe her own eyes as she peered into the glass with a delightful sense not merely of looking her best, but of being something quite other than the little person in plain tailor-made gowns who was familiar to her upon sharp spring mornings in Marsetshire, looking chilly and uninterested. The loose robes floated lightly about her, a rainbow of delicate colours; the airiest chiffons, placed one over the other, producing a charming harmony of faint rose and blue and green. Her fine, pale hair, waved and

curled, flowed over her shoulders under a dew-dropped crown of wild roses, and there were pink petals and dewdrops scattered lightly over the flowing folds arranged with such cunning.

"But it is superb," cried Francine. "Madame is charming, and all these Messieurs will expire of jealousy of Monsieur le Mari. Will she graciously permit the maids of the hotel to behold her? They wait without."

Titania moved to the little landing with her heart beating from sheer shyness. She there found not only a dozen maids, full of shrill interjections of delight, but the tall chef, who offered his congratulations with much dignity and, indeed, rather the air of a fellow-artist.

Miranda's costume was simple enough. One of her own plain white skirts, and a loose blouse of lace, cut away to show a very round throat. The arrangement of her hair had been carefully copied from the well-known picture. But this tableau was not placed upon the programme, and was to come at the end, as a surprise.

Daisy, in the carriage, her splendours hidden under a white dust-cloak, put one question rather anxiously—

"Are you *sure* I look as nice in my second dress?"



"They are both faultless and absolutely becoming. Are you getting very vain, Daisy?"

"No. All this is just a dream, and I shall soon be back giving the cook notice. But oh, Miranda, I do wish Archie was here to-night, and my babies. It's such a pity the people you really care about are, somehow, never there just when you want them."

Miranda suddenly felt a contradictory wish that Préval should look at his own Alice. She had studied the mocking expression in the picture, and fancied she was well able to assume it. She certainly had no desire to see Fraser Micklethwaite in the audience, nor did the idea of shining in his presence present itself as attractive.

She was in gay spirits when they made their way to the green-room, conveniently at the left of the pretty little stage, of which it commanded a very fair side-view. Victor de Verton had had special leave from the committee to be drawn up out of sight of the spectators, and around him skipped an excited bevy of fairies, headed by Paulette in all her glory.

The theatre, intensely hot, and heavy with scent, was crowded in all parts, with a preponderance of very smart ladies, fluttering fans, and

a trifle aggrieved that here and there bold innovators were objecting in vain to their plummy hats, so picturesque above the demi-toilette of which the Frenchwoman is supreme mistress.

Mrs. Sturge, very flushed, and covered with rattling black bugles, was making personal remarks down Mrs. Medlicott's ear-trumpet, and no one thought of listening to the orchestra as it played charmingly the Mendelssohn overture to the *Midsummer Night's Dream*. At the very back of the theatre, in a dark corner, nearly behind a pillar, a tall man in evening dress sat alone, holding a programme in front of him, as if he did not wish to be recognized. He was the one exception to the rule, and the dainty, tripping fairy footsteps of that aerial inspiration pleased him.

For quite suddenly Maurice Préval had tired of solitude, and felt that he should like to see his little Paulette, unseen. Before the curtain drew up, the music changed to a mere ripple of accompaniment, and a clear full voice rang out with a pretty unexpectedness :—

- “ I know a bank whereon the wild thyme blows,  
Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,  
Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,  
With sweet musk roses and with eglantine :  
There sleeps Titania sometimes of a night.”

The curtains moved slowly aside, and there was a murmur, changing to hearty applause as the voice of the unseen singer died gradually away. The picture was beautiful—the stage artistically arranged with real shrubs and flowers; the fair-haired queen asleep upon a green bank, with her bright-eyed watching elves. With the veil of gauze to etherealize the sweetness of Titania, and her four dainty attendants, Maurice Prével thought it might well have been that wood near Athens where those are to be pitied who have never gathered “love-in-idleness.” Again and again the curtains closed but to open, until there were loud calls for the song, and once more he listened, and remembered a little purple island, a dream of siren mermaids in their shell-strewn coral caves.

Titania came forward very timidly to bow to the audience, greeted by the Parisian fairies with an aplomb she envied. Paulette kissed her small hand to a friend with admirable nonchalance, and, picking up a bouquet flung from the back rows, offered it to her sovereign lady with a fascinating smile.

Miranda could not appear without a chance of spoiling the great surprise, though that secret had leaked out as such secrets will, for Prével

heard a lady in front of him whisper, "Dó you know, the last of all is to be something from *Perfides*. That will be more interesting than this little Anglaise, so utterly devoid of cachet, as I think. And Shakespeare also is rather rococo."

He went out hastily into the warm, dusky night, and wandered down towards the sea, coming softly nearer and nearer to the green cliffs, as if to gently kiss them. There was nothing here *aride et solitaire*; everywhere the tinkle of music, the light laughter of the careless; sometimes a pair of lovers walking together where he walked alone. "A bank whereon the wild thyme blows." With the words came the recollection of cool, silent Warwick woods where he had once wandered in a solitude peopled with fair visions of the woman he loved. His love had withered like the wild thyme in autumn, and there was no perfume in the dry blossoms. "If she had but died and left me my illusions." The old pitiful plaint went out as he looked across the dim waters, murmuring their lovely, incomprehensible poetry.

"That was a sweet voice, full of gladness and hope," he thought; a voice matching those gleaming tresses he had seen in the sunshine.



“‘There sleeps the fairy queen,’ but sleeps too soundly for me to awaken her to tell me the old, old stories and make me young again. And that woman who could prefer *Perfides* to Shakespeare ! Of what are such creatures made ? Powder and absinthe instead of flesh and blood. I stand here, a pigmy at the feet of the Colossus, and can only despair of my own littleness.

“Toute création à laquelle on aspire,  
Tout rêve, toute chose émanent de Shakespeare.

“All this work of mine, the world acclaims just because it is so ignorant, is not worth one golden sonnet-line of the great wonder-book. I—I dwell like a squirrel in a cage, and describe again and again every bar of my prison. He wanders in a wide divine world, and can meet Puck as well as Hamlet, or laugh with Beatrice as he weeps with Lear. Perhaps some day I shall find my way home to the wood near Athens ; the glow-worm lights showed for a bright instant to-night.

“But I must return and kiss my Paulette, the little witch, and beg Victor to pray his patron saint that she grows not too like her mother.”

Safe once more behind his pillar, he was glad he had come in time to see “Past and Present.” In the first a knight knelt at the feet of a maiden

placing a laurel wreath upon his helmet, watched by a group of ladies and cavaliers. It had been carefully arranged from the Salon picture of the year, and Herapath wore with much grace a splendid suit of silver-inlaid armour lent by the de Vertons. Daisy, in an old French dress of embroidered sky-blue velvet from the same source, looked well, but not as lovely as in Titania's robes. Nor was her expression quite as calm, for Herapath had taken advantage of his position to kiss her hand before the curtain rose, and though to French spectators it was a most ordinary and permitted homage, to Daisy it was strange, and significant of things at which she was making dim guesses. The orchestra played a *pot-pourri* of old French airs, eloquent of romance and chivalry, and again the curtains fell.

With great rapidity they drew back, to the strains of "Nuage Rose," the waltz of the season. A circle of veritable fashion-plates sat round the stage in daring gowns of the moment, with the barest of shoulders and the biggest of hats. They were looking jealously at Mrs. Scott-Battersby, who, glittering with sequins, smiled as "Tou-Tou" Deruche, in modern evening dress, pinned a great butterfly cotillon favour to

the velvet strap where should have been a sleeve. The two stood in the centre, "Tou-Tou," with his ordinary air of consummate impudence, making wholesome young Britons long to kick him; Dot Scott-Battersby with her scarlet frills audaciously caught up in one hand to show the red satin shoes, with preposterous high heels, huge buckles, and more than a glimpse of open-worked red stockings with silver clocks.

The clapping was prolonged and fervent. It was the first of the tableaux with the slightest touch of vulgarity, and rejoiced the hearts of those—and they are legion—who like nothing half so well. "Tou-Tou" led Mrs. Battersby to the front, and the pair bowed and laughed with an agreeable sense that theirs was the success of the night. Even Mrs. Sturge and Mrs. Medlicott forgot for a moment how shocked they ought to have been, and tittered, with an undercurrent of joy in the reflection that this indeed was what they had rather expected to see—and to discuss later.

Préval was disgusted, and almost decided to go away again. But curiosity prevailed, and, quite unaware that the sharp eyes of Paulette had perceived him, he waited. The illusion was really extraordinary when the great yellow book

appeared before the wildly cheering audience. A popular novelist is far more of a personage in France than he ever is in England, and this was the idol of literary Paris just then. Yvonne and Miranda, seen through their oval frames, were so astonishingly like the well-known pictures that the sensation to the creator of their originals was very singular. Yvonne, of course, he knew well, but Miranda's, for the moment, was a strange face. Kneeling behind the screen, she was not nervous or in the least afraid of moving. She had fixed her mind so firmly upon the faithless Alice that she had thrown herself into her individuality quite as if she were acting. The result was a pale, piquante face, with disdain in the keen grey eyes.

Paulette had rushed to Madame de Verton, who was overflowing with pride. "But the Uncle Maurice is really present, *là-bas*, behind the pillar."

It was enough. The news spread like wildfire, and cries of "Author! author!" filled the theatre. A French audience will be enthusiastic on so little provocation that such a golden opportunity for shrill bravoës was not likely to be missed. Préval could not get out. A resolute clapper blocked the door smilingly, only increasing his desire by no means to go upon the stage.



Presently a gay little figure in yellow, with shimmering wings, fluttered beside him. "Madame de Verton, and Monsieur Victor also, pray that you will let me bring you to bow your thanks. They will not go home until you come, and already it is almost midnight. If they remain, then the ladies lose all their profits, because they must pay more for the theatre, and the little orphans will have the less bread."

It was irresistible, and presently Préval, with his hand firmly clasped in that of the fairy Mustard-seed, retired amid a rain of roses flung by impulsive women who obviously forgave him *Perfides*. He took refuge in the green-room, and found Victor de Verton full of excited pleasure, despite his obvious fatigue.

"Admit, my friend, that, if you did not care for your own share, the rest was worth the journey from Briac. What did you think of fairyland?"

"Ah, that was altogether delightful till I knew the singer to be—Alice. She took me to Athens, and the jerk back to Paris was unwelcome."

"But it is in fairyland she is most at home," insisted Victor. "And here comes Titania. Let me present you."

Daisy, with an excuse as to the great heat, had

taken off her velvet robes, and put back her floating chiffons, her dewdropped roses on her hair. There was to be supper at the Hôtel d'Albion, and Herapath had said to her, "I may have to leave Dinard soon. Let me see Titania once again before I go."

Préval bowed very graciously to this pretty blonde, for Daisy had that inexplicable power of quite unconsciously pleasing all men. No one quite knows the secret of its existence, and beauties and wits often sigh in vain to find it out.

"Madame, I have to thank you for a beautiful picture. It is something to be with Shakespeare in fancy, if but for a moment, and you took me away to dream with him."

Daisy was not equal to understanding the delicacy of the compliment, but, although she had never read one of Préval's own books, the distinction of his bearing made her feel it not the least wonderful part of this wonderful night that such a celebrity should be joining the chorus of praises. Who was she? The humdrum mother of Tony and Baby, the Martha of endless housekeeping cares, or this queen of beauty of whom they talked in French and English?

The next moment Yvonne de la Rivière and

Miranda came in, still in their white dresses, although they had removed every trace of paint and powder.

Préval went forward at once. "Thank you, Mademoiselle Yvonne, for making a fascinating Désirée when to assume such a character must have been especially difficult. May I also offer congratulations, although to the fortunate Monsieur de Castel rather than to you, whom I have known so long, as I have not yet the honour of his acquaintance?"

Yvonne murmured her thanks with her unfailing grace, but turned quickly aside to pet little Camille, who, far from fulfilling Paulette's prophecy as to the result of temper and tears, made the most gossamer of Moths in grey, with feathery wings.

Then it was Miranda's turn. For once de Verton was dissatisfied with the friend who was so coldly ceremonious, and who merely obeyed the barest dictates of courtesy in his few grave words. Miranda was equally chilly and very dignified. Standing there in his evening dress, he was exactly like Dulac's portrait, after all, she decided. She forgot de Verton's confidences, and only remembered how hard he was upon herself and her comrades. "Yet the writing

women—even George Everard Stokes—will continue to exist, if one clever Frenchman wants to improve the world by doing away with them,” she thought defiantly, turning with relief to “Tou-Tou” Deruche, who was profuse in his compliments, in rather vain expectations of flattery for himself in return.

Madame de Verton hurried up to Préval. “You will come to supper with us all. It will be very gay.”

“A thousand thanks. It is impossible. I must get back to Briac.”

“Nonsense, my friend. Your car will catch no cold, and you will never be so cruel as to disappoint us.”

Whilst he sought for any cogent excuse for getting away from a company for which he felt something stronger than disinclination, Paulette and Fi-Fi, weeping bitterly, flung themselves upon him.

“Uncle Maurice, be good to us. We are in despair,” wailed Paulette dismally. “Imagine, they say we are to go to bed, and not to supper at all, when it is so clear that, if the Queen goes, her fairies go also. Even Yvonne deserts us, and promises chocolate if we go to our beds as if we were as young as Bébé. And one says



there will be no places at the table, yet thou art asked."

"Well, well, *trésor*, be calm," said Préval, kissing both tear-stained faces. "For once you and Fi-Fi and Camille and Marie-Angèle shall sup with me. There shall be a second table for us, and we will all go together in my automobile to command it."

"What caprices has genius ever!" was Madame de Verton's comment as the automobile flashed down the steep street, amid cries of rapture from the triumphant fairies, carefully bestowed in coquettish hooded cloaks.

Miranda, seated next Victor de Verton at supper, could see all that went on at the round table, in which she struggled not to feel interested, and once Paulette rushed over to them with a bird delightfully modelled in bread, which Préval had made for her. "He has given also pigs to Camille, and a horse to Fi-Fi. Ah, we amuse ourselves well."

At the large table there was plenty of merriment, and by-and-by speeches were made; but Préval insisted that "Tou-Tou" Deruche should return his thanks to the "Perfides," which he did, partly in the very latest French slang, partly in his amazing English. Major Herapath was

reluctantly forced to propose "The Ladies of the Committee," and positively broke down from sheer nervousness.

"And now, Uncle Maurice, who speaks for the fairies? Surely they deserve something as well as all these ancient ones. Arise thou, and tell them we also are charming," cried Paulette.

Even Miranda had to own that was the speech of the night. Hoisting Paulette on his shoulder, Préval proclaimed himself the knight ready to do battle for four queens of beauty. His few words were touched with such a pretty fantasy, such a grace of diction, that the delighted children clapped little joyful hands, and afterwards submitted to go home, dropping with the sleep against which they had fought so valiantly.

"And now we will have just one valse to finish well the soirée," urged "Tou-Tou." "I have had the room here prepared, and engaged the Hungarians for one hour."

"And you shall leave when you have danced just with your 'Perfides.' You cannot refuse Yvonne. A fiancée has a special claim; all must do as she wishes," said Madame de Verton to Préval.

If Miranda had heard that remark, she would probably have gone straight home. But Préval

was fond of his friend's good-natured aunt, and felt compelled to reluctant obedience. When he and Yvonne went into the parquet-floored salon, fragrant with flowers and cool with great open seaward windows, the rest were dancing.

"It is years since I danced," said Préval, "but this music seems to force me to forget I am not twenty-one."

Yvonne de la Rivière was very white as they moved to the quick measure. With his strong arm round her, his eyes looking down upon her, her courage weakened. Monsieur de Castel looked older, stouter, more punctilious than ever, in her thoughts. Marriage or the convent—there was no alternative. It was so dreadful to be poor, and forced to choose.

When the music next began, Miranda heard Préval ask ceremoniously for the honour of her hand with absolute amazement. She was murmuring something evasive when Madame de Verton explained matters by a tap of her fan. "Ma'mselle Alice, this cavalier dances only with his 'Perfides.'"

Miranda saw with annoyance that he was merely obeying orders, and refused with decision.

Préval urged her a second time. "If you do not concede me one turn, my good aunt will not free me," he complained.

"Well, then, to oblige Madame de Verton," Miranda said, with freezing emphasis.

She danced beautifully, but her heart was beating with an uncomfortable anger and wounded pride. He probably imagined her overwhelmed by the honour, but how mistaken he was! she reflected. As they floated round with the passionate music speaking of love, and youth, and pleasure, she longed to tell him that she was a hard-working writer, and that she cared nothing for his rapier-thrusts at such defenceless foes. She was quite silent, and they scarcely spoke, even when the sudden ending came. Only afterwards they both recalled with surprise that they had danced right through the waltz, from its beginning to its half-melancholy ending.



## CHAPTER VII

### DAWN

“**Y**VONNE is to have the room next yours at your villa to-night, as my sister requires hers ; with Madame Mostyn upon the other side, the bride of Monsieur de Castel will be well guarded.”

With these final words Madame de Verton, brisk and lively to the last, had kissed each of the three girls on both cheeks as she deposited them safely at the gate of the dark little garden, full of the dewy incense of self-sown mignonette.

Miranda had felt certain that the excited Daisy would have lingered with her, and was relieved when Titania vanished to lay aside her sovereignty without any confidences or even comments. She herself was not in the least sleepy, and as she sat brushing her hair beside the open window, her reflections were altogether unsatisfactory. As a rule, she thought and acted with decisive independence, and her present

intense desire for some reliable advice was a new and, to her, a disagreeable sensation. She could read Mark Herapath like an open book. To her own peace of mind he could never have been dangerous for a moment, although she had taken some pains to study his character, and to assure herself that he was an absolutely commonplace example of a type so wearisomely frequent in fiction that we illogically conclude it to be rare in fact.

But Daisy? Married so young, living so quietly where men of his class were practically unknown, was there possible danger for her? Should she read her an elderly-sister lecture, and probably by so doing give the whole incident an importance it had not previously possessed? Half the flirtations in the world would die painless natural deaths but for this fatal practice of talking them over. Even the survival of the unfittest would be less troublesome if they could but be let alone.

To spoil Daisy's innocent pleasure in her little triumphs would be unfair, and perhaps unnecessary. She had been in the background too long. It was not her proper place, and sooner or later she was bound to come forward. The best course, supposing Major Herapath did not.

soon seek amusement in some other quarter, would be a few plain words to him, and not to Daisy at all. She wondered what his attitude would be if she, Miranda, frankly told him what she thought of him, for he was rather stupid, despite his valour and his medals. His very methods showed him ignorant of the ways of clever women, and he might possibly be taken aback. But at present she would only set her wits against his to the extent of keeping him separated from Daisy so adroitly that neither would guess how the result came about. It might not be easy, but she would do what she could.

Having arrived at this decision, her thoughts wandered back to Maurice Préval, despite her best endeavours. At home in London at literary parties, it might be pleasant to claim an acquaintance made so unwillingly by both. But now? She burnt to think how duty and ceremonious obedience to Madame de Verton had compelled that dance. He was unreasonable, childish, to visit the sins of one Englishwoman upon all the rest. Yet even with Daisy he had been utterly different. But then, to Daisy every one was kind, she thought a little wistfully. She wished with all her heart that she had never been the

Alice of an instant, and then, in contradiction, wished that she had told him she was a writer. Probably they would not meet again. She would not go to Briac, for all its sunny bay. That first careless morning, when she had loitered on the little island, had been worth a dozen hot nights in the patchouli-scented theatre.

It was exquisite now, with just a faint, pale light in the east, promising the rose-flushed summer dawn. She would read a little while, to quiet her thoughts. But as she turned to take up a well-worn volume of Browning, she noticed another book lying beside it, with a note in Victor de Verton's fine, delicate writing: "I lend you my copy of *Pervenches* in the assurance that it will give you a beautiful hour."

Miranda sighed and hesitated. Then something that was not all curiosity conquered, and she began the short stories written when Maurice Préval still believed in love and honour. There were tears upon her lashes more than once, which she brushed away almost indignantly. What lovely work it was! Perfect in form, with that crystal-clear style which has always been the wonder of critics, the despair of imitators. She forgot the man altogether in sheer delight in his imaginings. There was one brief idyll of a



summer night—a meeting of two lovers, intimate as a confidence. Miranda seemed to stand with them upon the beach at Briac, described as it was in ten lines, each line a picture in miniature. Could she ever dare to try to make a book, when such asphodels as these grew on Parnassus? Miranda had that rare and fine quality of a full, deep appreciation of the best in literature. She was far too clever not to know that cleverness never consists in fault-finding. The dullest can pick holes, but only the elect can experience this “fine careless rapture” over the beauty of the flower of a mind.

It was the ideal hour for such a book, and she read on until she was roused from her absorbed delight by a movement in one of the next rooms, followed by a sound of half-stifled sobs. She opened the door of communication between herself and Daisy, but did not disturb the sleeper there. She looked very fair and young as she lay with one hand clasping the portrait of her babies, hung round her neck. She was smiling, as if those plump guardian angels were moving about her in her dreams, and Miranda felt that, thus shielded, she was very safe. Not for the first time, it came over her that she too would

like to have held a little son in her arms and spoken the proud word, "Mine."

Perhaps Yvonne de la Rivière was ill or unhappy. Without hesitation Miranda went into the passage and knocked softly.

Yvonne, who was still completely dressed, came out and looked resentfully at the intruder. "What do you want, Mademoiselle?" she said in a hard voice. Her face was tear-stained, and there was something so tragic in her set expression of misery that Miranda spoke the truth quite simply.

"I thought you were in pain or in trouble, and I came to try to comfort you." She laid her hand on Yvonne's with so sympathetic a touch that the girl's mood changed in a moment, and she bent her head and wept again, as if in a very abandonment of grief.

"Life is so hard, and I am so lonely," she murmured between her tears.

"I am alone—an orphan, like you; but I am not miserable. Why should you be?" said Miranda.

But Yvonne had sunk down upon her knees beside the bed, and hidden her face. Her slight shoulders shook with sobs.

"Do tell me what your sorrow is," repeated

Miranda. "I am very discreet, and even the telling does good."

Yvonne sprang to her feet, and spoke with passion in every word. "You can only help me if you have loved as I love, and that is impossible."

"No, I have never loved in this serious way. It seems almost terrible." Miranda spoke slowly, amazed at the reply to her simple question.

"It *is* terrible," cried Yvonne. "But for you, in your fortunate country, it is never as for us. You are so calm and cold, and I have read in your English romances of those who all their lives keep their hearts a shrine for the one idol. They have not to choose, as I must, between marriage and the convent. See! I am so poor, and what can be done when my good Aunt de Verton dies? I have not courage or talents to make my living, and for a vocation I have prayed in vain. To saints like Victor the world is just a stepping-stone to Paradise, but to me it is everything. Death is so far away."

"And he you love? Is it all impossible?"

Miranda could not reconcile the suave acquaintance of the hotel terraces with this wild white figure with the dark, dishevelled hair.

Yvonne had seemed the embodiment of the obedient, complacent *jeune fille* of French plays, and now here instead, in the pale, searching dawn, stood the heroine of a tragedy. She had only read of Passion until now. To her it had seemed aloof from a reasonable modern woman. In this mysterious hour, half night, half morning, she for the first time felt it near her, a fiery actual presence, crushing down conventions, and asserting to her own defiant heart that all the poets knew the truth, and that she herself was only ignorant, and not, as she had thought, safeguarded by cool common sense and a disciplined mind.

“It is wholly impossible. To him I am nothing.”

Miranda put her arms about her as Yvonne clung to her.

“Ah, how good you are! I have kept my secret till now. I dared not even weep, for fear of being heard by my aunt; but to-night I thought I might for once be miserable. Two years ago I used to go to the churches and pray that a miracle might be accomplished, but all the time I knew that he could never look down so far. The saints did not hear, and then I prayed all the more for a vocation. That too came no-



To be in the convent, behind the white, cold walls, never to see his face, would not keep me from dreaming of it always."

"But, Yvonne, surely you are wrong, wicked, to feel as you do, and yet to think of marrying Monsieur de Castel."

"No. He asks only my esteem, and trusts to time to make me forget the difference of our ages. He is very kind, and I shall perform my duty. I cannot starve; I will not take vows that are lies."

"But your marriage vows will be as false, and worse, if they spoil two lives instead of one. Take courage; do what is right; refuse Monsieur de Castel. Then, at least, you may love without sin."

"Is that what you would do?"

"At any cost I would be honest. Supposing there ever came a day when the barriers between you and the other were broken down—and you in chains?" She paused.

Yvonne looked at her sadly. The sun suddenly flashed up over the shining sea, filling the little room with golden light. With the gesture that is not theatrical in a Frenchwoman she spoke. "Just for once in all my life I will say it. Poor, without money and without beauty, I

love Maurice Préval. Oh, he has never guessed it ; he has hardly even regarded my existence. If the great celebrity deigns to honour the salon of Madame de Castel, it will be but for the sake of Victor. To-night I danced with him. Ah, if I could have died whilst his arms were round me ! But Heaven is not so kind."

All unreasonably, Miranda, moved by a great compassion, felt full of anger against Préval. She forgot *Pervenches*, and thought of him at play with the elfish Paulette, or busy with the wonderful, hateful novels he wrote now, indifferent to all this anguish. She forgot her tact, and blundered.

"Rise above your weakness ; he is not worth it," she counselled impossibly. "Look ! he dissects our hearts in his books as surgeons dissect corpses—without any feeling of pity. Such a man would make a cruel husband."

Yvonne was up in arms in a moment. "Silence ! What you say is not true. Maurice is all that is noble and honourable. I shall always glory in my love for him, just because it is so grand to love the highest. Mademoiselle, you wish to be very kind ; but wait to speak until you know. Some day your turn will come. You have read of the little French

*ingénue*, and you think that is what I am. Now you will understand that it is different, and that we are not as you behold us in a drama *à la Sainte Mousseline*. See ! it is morning. We have both been dreaming. You will forgive my foolishness, and speak of it never again. Only for the last time I pray you not to try to comfort me by misjudging Maurice, or to fear for me. I shall not fail. I am a *de la Rivière*. But I have often thought it would be an English-woman he would choose. To-night—to-night I watched him as you sang, and he looked so happy. I cannot sing, and—I hated you. Forgive me.”

To Miranda, sore with the thought of Préval’s icy compliment to Alice, the words seemed an irony. She flushed as she replied, with a touch of bitterness, “We are in dreamland still, that you should fancy such absurdities. Monsieur Préval’s ceremonious politeness to me was detestable. For him I am only one more Anglaise *pour rire*. Let us end this conversation, if it is indeed impossible for me to prevent you from marrying one man when loving another.”

But Yvonne, with that French quickness always something of a puzzle to us, had become her calm everyday self. The metamorphosis

was bewilderingly rapid, and Miranda was tired and almost repelled by the suddenness of the strange confidence and its incongruous conclusion.

She went away in silence, for she had felt so strongly on that July afternoon in Beaulieu Street that marriage for maintenance and a home was altogether odious. Her independent life had never looked more charming than when she had sat alone that evening, full of visions of the Brittany she had not found, although the sea was as blue, the sky as clear, the villa gardens just as full of flowers. What a topsy-turvy world it was! Without any cause, Préval had made her wretched by his absurd resentment of that past in which her compatriot had played such a conspicuous part. Then he had, indeed, given her a beautiful hour. And, finally, a passing expression on his face had roused an impossible jealousy against her in this strange girl.

She slept uneasily, and at six o'clock she gave up the attempt and decided it would be best to get out under the sky, away from realities like dreams and dreams like realities, in which Maurice Préval had stood beside her



while she sang some strange, exquisite song she could not now recall.

She put on her bathing dress and, throwing her cloak over her shoulders, ran down the dirty steps leading to the calm and welcoming sea. It was high water, and only a narrow strip of silvery beach was visible. The cool, lonely freedom was delicious. Miranda's cares slipped from her as she began to swim with a glorious sense of strength and invigoration. How much farther she could go than when she first came, and how delightful it was to share the morning beauty with two or three seagulls!

She stayed in the tepid water a long time, and, until she came out, did not notice that Mrs. Sturge, not quite at her best in a costume revealing a superfluity of ankle, was standing upon the sands watching her.

"Good morning, Mrs. Sturge. How early you are! Are you going to have a bathe?" she said cheerfully.

There are people to whom the obvious is the only thing ever said, because it is felt to be the only thing they can understand. Mrs. Sturge was essentially of these. Regardless of her undignified appearance, she endeavoured to assume the full importance of her husband's

office as she answered, "I was anxious to have a few words with you, Miss Ricordan, and, unless you are afraid of taking cold, the opportunity is favourable."

Miranda, who felt in a good temper with the whole world, huddled her white cloak about her and sat down, enjoying the warmth and brightness. "I often take a sun bath to dry myself, and find it only does me good," she replied.

"I feel I am only doing my duty as wife of the chaplain in pointing out that the behaviour of your young friend is, to say the least of it, imprudent. I think it best to speak to you first, as you are so much older, although you are unmarried."

Mrs. Sturge had never quite got over her own amazing good fortune in escaping the old-maidhood so especially dreadful in her eyes. To contrast herself, in all the importance of the married state, with mateless Miranda, gave her a distinct sense of pleasant superiority. Miranda just then looked so fresh, and the few golden locks escaping under the blue cap so glittering, that "much older" did not seem quite a valid reason.

"I had no idea that continental chaplaincies for the husbands meant such disagreeable offices

to the wives as interference in matters of very little concern to them. Daisy looks younger than she is, and is remarkably well able to manage her own affairs."

"Miss Ricordan, I am obliged to differ with you. Mrs. Mostyn is, I fear, flirting far too much with Major Herapath, in spite of my warning to you upon the first day. I took counsel with dear Mrs. Medlicott, and we were both much grieved——"

"It was extremely—energetic of you," said Miranda, pausing before selecting an unexpected word which replaced something more outspoken. "Before we say anything more, do you merely mean that Major Herapath pays Daisy some attention because he possibly admires her? You could scarcely even hint to me that my particular friend was what you call behaving badly."

"Really, Miss Ricordan, you need not be so annoyed because I have done what I felt to be necessary. Mrs. Medlicott noticed——"

"I do not want to hear what such observant eyes perceived."

"Her own daughter, you see, always behaves so perfectly. Darling Kitty is such a little lady. She would never——"

"No, never," interrupted Miranda laughingly.

"Do let me beg you, Mrs. Sturge, to put no foolish ideas into Daisy's head. You see, Miss Medlicott is comfortably exempt from temptation, which does make her exemplary conduct distinctly easier. Daisy was bound to discover she was pretty, but I do not fancy the discovery will hurt her. She is devoted to her husband and her babies, and not likely to have her head turned by a few silly compliments, as plainer women might. She knows that Major Herapath is married, and I am quite aware that he is rather foolish in some respects. If we were to leave, when it is known that we have our rooms for another month, it would surely be enough to make him even vainer than he is."

"Ah, but the danger, Miss Ricordan. You are so much mixed up with all the foreigners that I trust you are not allowing their insidious influence——"

"Please allow me to choose my own acquaintances, Mrs. Sturge. I am most anxious to remain on friendly terms, but can't you see how ridiculous it would be of me to go to Daisy and inform her that she has become an object of intense interest to the entire hotel just because she has danced a few times when others have had no partners? She cannot help being



attractive; and if people persist in noticing what is obvious, is it wise to underline the fact to her, at present so unconscious and so simple? We will make a compact. You will promise to say nothing to her, and I will promise to take Major Herapath to task myself."

"Oh, but that would be too dreadful," said Mrs. Sturge, who had seated herself beside Miranda, with a reckless display of the thick ankles. "Surely, surely you would never dream of such bold conduct?"

"Well, Mrs. Sturge, if you do not shrink from your duties, ought I to shirk mine? I can't scold Daisy for Major Herapath's preference for talking English to her because the de Vertons, with all their good manners, find his French incomprehensible."

Mrs. Sturge arose, with a feeling that the longer they talked the more ridiculously independent this exasperating woman became. "I shall not again attempt to advise one so very headstrong," she continued crossly, yet with all the stateliness—it was not much—of which her damp magenta raiment permitted. "But, unfortunately, there is a question concerning yourself I am reluctantly compelled to ask. Last night a connection of dear Mrs. Medlicott's

who writes for the papers arrived at Dinard on his way to Pontorson. He went to the tableaux, which, I am sure you will forgive my saying, disappointed us a little, after the fuss that has been made about them ; and he declares that he has met you in London, and that your name was *then* Miss Georgina Stokes. The circumstance is so very singular that I felt it imperative to seek an explanation. I do trust I shall not hear you are on the stage, but Mr. Fodderby said there was a—a person dancing at the music-halls with hair very like yours.”

Miranda laughed merrily ; and she was blessed with that rare charm, a pretty laugh. “It is very, very good of you to come straight to me in this matter. The fact is that I too write for the papers, and when I do I call myself George Everard Stokes. But when I am on a holiday I do not care to be any one but my father’s daughter.”

“I do not wonder you are just a little ashamed. One reads such dreadful things in newspapers that it does not seem quite nice for a lady to write them ; and then, too, it seems so unfeminine to take a man’s name. But now, may I ask if you are well paid ? I have often thought I should like to make a little pocket-

money in that easy way. Not to write novels, you know, but just little things in the magazines."

"Payment varies very much ; it is good for good work. But, Mrs. Sturge, may I beg you as a great favour not to mention such uninteresting facts as concern me?"

"I cannot help it if Mrs. Medlicott should have told any of her friends, but I am quite ready to wash my hands of the whole matter."

"What a kind and sensible conclusion ! I will have just one more short swim before I go in to dress."

Back in her room before the sleepy Daisy had stirred, Miranda felt vigorous enough to be ready for any emergencies.

"To think of that idiotic little Fodderby, who makes himself such a nuisance at the Writers' Friday teas, turning up here ! But, after all, if only the English discover George, it does not much matter."

Francine brought up the rolls and hot coffee, and lingered to chat as Miranda discussed them with a fine appetite. The *petit déjeuner*, before an open window, with a sea view beyond and mignonette beneath it, is the very poetry of a meal when the hungry breakfaster is fresh from the salt waves.

"What a success was Madame's, and yours also, last night!" began Francine. "Juliette, of the second floor over there, says that *affreuse* Mrs. Sturge was of a jealousy unimaginable. She loves not those who have *chic*. The Cousine Séraphine has been here with her raspberries, and, although a relative, charged me the full market price for these I have brought for you. She would bargain over a mass for her mother, that one. She will inform all Briac what sort of ladies I serve. Madame sleeps well, and I was able to show Séraphine her superb toilettes at the door. She will now, perhaps, cease making scandals of me and of that chatterbox Jules."

Miranda dipped the big yellow raspberries into the sugar luxuriously. "But surely, Francine, Jules would be a little youthful for you."

"That makes nothing. Love counts not by the number of the years." Stout as she was, Francine assumed the satisfied air of a triumphant coquette, and Miranda felt alarmed.

"Surely, surely, Francine, you will not desert me?" she said pathetically.

"Never, dear lady, until you marry yourself into too splendid a ménage for your poor Francine. Yet Jules is not too ugly. He is a good



boy, and it is perhaps as well that they at Briac should perceive me to be appreciated. When that saint, Monsieur Victor, expires, Jules will return to his art and range himself; he has said it."

"A painter, then?" hazarded Miranda.

"No, Mademoiselle; a coiffeur of no mean skill. And he says also that when he has a little *magasin* there at Arles, in his own country, he prays Providence to provide him such a *chevelure* as your own for his window."

## CHAPTER VIII

### MONT ST. MICHEL

AT the rather painful price of reading some impossible little tales in dog's-eared manuscript, supposed to reveal genius on the part of Miss Kitty Medlicott, but mainly characterised by mistakes in spelling and a trying absence of punctuation, Miranda contrived to keep the unwelcome discovery of George Stokes from reaching Victor de Verton. She had never fully owned to him with what delight she had read *Pervenches* three times, or to herself how strong grew her fear lest Préval should ever hear of her as a writer.

The possibilities of book-making had at length slipped a little into the background of her life. Yvonne de la Rivière's wild tears had taught her that there were sharper pains than the dull ache of disappointment over rejected copy. Her habit of basing everything upon her progress in the work she had chosen had insensibly lessened in

these few idle weeks. Only the present seemed real. A curtain had fallen between it and that near past alternating between Beaulieu Street and the Chelsea flat.

The success of the tableaux had not been talked over very handsomely, after all. There had been so much said beforehand that Dinard had passed on to the next social events casting shadows before, and would have divided its interests pretty equally between the forthcoming tennis tournament and a masked ball to be given by twenty-five bachelors at the Casino, more than one of whom had merely assumed that name for the holidays.

But there had befallen something far more exciting to make the Plage buzz with animated voices and shrill conjecture. After the dance Major Herapath and "Tou-Tou" Deruche had gone together to the baccarat rooms. A very wealthy young American had carried all before him; but with Herapath's coming the tide had turned, and for the first time fortune had smiled upon him. He had won a considerable sum, exaggerated to such vast proportions by many-tongued rumour that Dot Scott-Battersby had done her best to restore him to his allegiance—a very injudicious best, in which the name of

Daisy Mostyn had figured constantly. He had been so much less with them in consequence that Miranda had thankfully postponed explanations of any kind, although she observed with a slight sense of alarm that Daisy was a little quieter. Herapath had at last made a step forward, for she consciously missed him.

Madame de Verton had duly presented a stout but distinguished-looking gentleman, nearer sixty than fifty, as Monsieur de Castel, and both Miranda and Daisy had been invited to a smart *diner de fiançailles* at the Grand Hotel, where Yvonne, in the regulation gown of delicate pink, and a lovely antique necklace of pearls, had looked very graceful and as calmly content as if Maurice Préval were as much an unreality as one of his own characters.

"What born actresses these French girls are!" Miranda had thought wonderingly. Her own life had been, so far, very transparent. She was almost amused to think how few secrets it held, and how little she had been called upon to be anything but quite natural. She had not realized even yet that, given occasion, in this sort of acting all women are adepts by instinct.

Yvonne's one fear had been that Monsieur de Castel would not wish her to play in the



tennis tournament. "I can, naturally, refuse nothing to my charming bride, but she will, of course, comprehend that for my wife public exhibitions of her grace will be impossible," he had said, with his usual bow. She had held the challenge cup as champion of France two years in succession, and she greatly longed to keep it permanently. Lawn-tennis was Yvonne's one accomplishment. Her skill had brought her suddenly out of the dull ranks of an unregarded mediocrity to be quite the fashion among that new school of young French people to whom games are fast becoming as serious matters as if they were English. The ringing cheers of last year would be redoubled if she won again, and the thought that perhaps Préval might witness her possible triumph, made her almost brilliant at the dinner she had dreaded.

Madame de Verton wore the calm air of a general at a banquet held in honour of a victory due to his talents. "To marry a niece *sans dot* to one so irreproachable as *ce cher* de Castel in these terrible times is a matter of thanksgiving indeed. My courage failed at the possible picture of a Madame Deruche rushing over all countries, the racquet in the hand, with that atrocious 'Tou-Tou.' Now she will range herself and

be altogether admirable. A little toilette and the de Castel diamonds will accomplish miracles; for, after all, beauty is so very much a money question, and so many are plain only because they are poor. As for the sons, they are *beaux garçons* who wear Hussar uniforms not too badly, and the *belle-maman* will look charming as she plays with her balls with them on the lawn of Choisey-le-Pré. A château and such a superb *appartement* in Paris—it is a veritable fairy tale."

The joyful old lady, in a fascinating grey brocade, with an elegant transformation, carefully waved, poured all these confidences into Miranda's attentive ears. As she listened, she pictured her own sensations had she been thus compelled to marry Fraser Micklethwaite. The idea was revolting to her. To give an empty hand for an honest heart full of love: never! She would rather remain as ignorant of the "great mystery," as Victor de Verton had called it, as he himself.

The weather, after a thunderstorm, had become much cooler, and she had persuaded the lazy Daisy that now was the time to go to Mont St. Michel, at any rate for the day. Daisy was a thoroughly bad excursionist. She was always

tired if she walked far, and her lack of enthusiasm when she arrived was only perceived by the discerning to be due to weariness, and not to that common national failing, a dull inability to appreciate.

Miranda was quite different. She drank in associations with a sort of thirsty eagerness. For her the past lived and moved, dim and splendid as a gorgeous dream, through storied cathedral aisles and ivied ruins. To rush to a famous spot as a sort of reason for a subsequent ability to say that she had "done" it would have appeared to her ridiculous. She insisted on time to breathe something of the actual atmosphere, and had that keen faculty of observation, making her delightful as a companion at such times.

The woman who never jars on the finer susceptibilities with the wrong remark at serious moments is not as plentiful as might be wished. Miranda had once heard an English girl discoursing of balls and polo in the Roman Catacombs, who would have been amazed if she could have guessed that she lost a possibly good husband in consequence ; for the insane idea that a perpetual trickle of talk is always

welcome and attractive, is, after all, too deeply ingrained to be easily eradicated.

A rumour that Mrs. Sturge intended getting up a party for Mont St. Michel sent them off early to Dinard on one of those still grey mornings in August, chilly with an unwelcome menace of nearing autumn. Dinard, half asleep, did not look its best, and there was no blue in the sea when the little boat took them across to St. Servan, so much balder and more uninteresting than the gay coast opposite, with its villa gardens like the decorations for some perpetual fête.

The train journey was not wearisome for all its slowness, through country thick-set with laden orchards, where the beautiful rose-coloured cider-apples used for the flavouring were beginning to blush in the branches ; but the most modern pilgrim cannot but heave a sigh for the old jolting carts when the final stage has to be accomplished by tram. The day was still and overcast, to the contentment of Daisy, who was always too hot, and the regret of Miranda, who was a sun worshipper.

Grumblers round them were protesting that all the illusion of the first view would be spoilt, because the tide was low. Dinard is so denuded



of all its graces at low water that Miranda was inclined to agree with them until they stepped out, and Mont St. Michel, set in a vast plain of pale sands, full of reflections of liquid silver, loomed upwards, lofty, strange, and sudden. The view had the wonderful atmosphere of a Corot, with the almost colourless sky above, and the vague, shifting tints of the sands beneath.

Miranda found it fascinatingly different from all the familiar pictures, saved thus from any harsh sharpness of its odd outlines against that flat, far horizon. The jaded professional sight-seer would have been scornful of her keen pleasure in this hackneyed ground, trampled over all the year round by a noisy horde of tourists, visited more reverently by throngs of pious pilgrims, at whose belief in the power of the "Prince de la Milice Céleste" we may not dare to smile. For did not St. Michael himself, in ancient times, command the holy bishop, Aubert of Avranches, to erect a little chapel on the grand bare rock in his angelic honour; and did not the kings send treasure, the popes priceless relics, in gratitude for answered prayers at the wind-swept, sea-washed shrine? It gradually grew rich and sumptuous with

the imaginations of many a master craftsman until, side by side with its fantastic wonders of architecture, baser human hearts devised prisons and torture-chambers of unimaginable horror.

Even Daisy, with her mind bare of Miranda's quick-thronging visions of that devout and unutterably cruel past, exclaimed at the charm of the steep streets, full of the brightest shops, glittering with medals for the pious and pottery for the less heavenly-minded. There is indisputably a memory of Venice in the first satisfied glance at those dark emporiums, hung outside and in with every variety of tempting toy, irresistible to the kind folks who sweeten their home-coming by scattering presents in their sunshiny track.

But though, for the sake of her babies, Daisy longed to linger, they made their way upwards resolutely. All those steps after the most moderate indulgence in the best lunch in Brittany would be hopeless. As so often happens, Miranda's enjoyment was checked by the company in which she was compelled to seek it. A hundred personally conducted English clattered noisily along, of that objectionable type which persists in regarding rudeness as inde-

pendence, and common courtesy as a despicable form of hypocrisy, drowning even the nasal drone of the French guide, who pursued his dreary explanation utterly unmoved by questions he could not understand.

By them Mont St. Michel was clearly regarded as a fraud when it was realised that the iron cage had been destroyed by Charles the Tenth, who had not the heart to be so substantially reminded of the depravity of his royal predecessors. The dreadful groups of wax figures gave them some satisfaction, however, and even Daisy, approving, turned to her friend to ask, "Oh, Miranda, why don't you write a historical novel?"

"Because I have no desire to add to those galleries of heroes and heroines wearing the clothes of their period about as naturally as a dressmaker's dummy. It takes genius to make the dry bones of history live, and only quite a moderate talent to take our modest note of what goes on in our midst. No; I leave history to Scott, Thackeray, and dear old Dumas, and never mean to write dialogue where I am forced to take a sort of metaphorical pepper-pot to sprinkle in the 'by my halidomes' and 'marry come ups.' Do let us wait upon the

terrace for a moment or two, and then go into the church after these awful people have left it. I am a good Englishwoman, but there are times when I blush for my compatriots, and this is one of them. What can the French guide think of men obviously wishing to keep on their hats in what he regards as a holy of holies?"

"How very fond you are of everything French. I believe you would even have been capable of marrying one of them."

The wife of an English cricketer naturally felt she was not wholly kind in saying this, but Miranda only smiled. Looking out upon that broad view, the land of her childhood had an aspect intimately dear to her.

"If I had loved enough to marry, none of those things would have mattered. I think his country would have been my country, his God my God."

Daisy's blue eyes filled with a questioning wonder.

"That is the very first time I have ever heard you speak like that. Is there really some one at last?"

"There never has been, and I think there never will be. Little likings and momentary



fancies do not count. But come, let us go into the church and try to realize the place, instead of talking like a pair of sentimental schoolgirls, if there are such things nowadays."

But Daisy's sight-seeing powers had been tried to their utmost. "I *must* rest, if I am ever to get down," she insisted ; and Miranda, not at all reluctantly, went in alone.

Just why solitude seemed the one thing needful she did not ask herself, but afterwards she knew how at that moment a revelation had come to her, half fearful and yet half sweet. The church was not empty, after all. A little modish figure, with high brown boots and a charming hat, stood beside the altar steps of one of the side chapels. It was Paulette, and Paulette under a new aspect. For the child was crying quietly and looking at a small gold heart upon a slender chain. Children are never much surprised when they see familiar faces, and Paulette was in such dire need of a comforter and confidante that she came quickly towards Miranda without questioning.

"Dear Mademoiselle, you will help me ; for I dare not tell my uncle," she implored. "He is very good, for he himself brought me here because I told him that I had a secret reason

for wishing—ah! but wishing immensely—to see Mont St. Michel.”

“Well, but that should not make you cry. Come, sit down in my lap and tell me what is the matter, and I will wipe away the tears. Were you afraid of the figures? They are but wax, like great dolls.”

“I am not as Camille. I only sorrow when there is cause. It is this. Your Francine told my *bonne* that her aged mother came here and prayed so well that St. Michel never permitted her daughter to drown in crossing the sea or to be stifled by the fogs of London. She made an offering, the aged mother; and when I asked my *bonne* if the holy saints would take an offering also from me and hearken to my prayers, she said, ‘But assuredly, for the angels particularly regard the little cherubims.’ So I came, and I have brought my offering.”

Paulette choked as she showed her cherished heart from England.

“But what is it you want so much, darling?” asked Miranda, gathering her in her arms. “Your—your mother back again?”

“Ah, bah, never! for she loved me not. But what I want is that St. Michel should give Victor his desire. That must be to be well and strong

as we others. Once he said to me : ' Paulette, pray always that I may have my heart's desire ' ; and now, if I leave here my treasure for St. Michel, I am almost sure he will listen. Only he is a grown-up saint, and I am yet young. Kneel you with me and pray for Victor. Say that I know not how to ask in fine words, but that my meaning is as yours. Victor must never know what I have left here, and that is why I would not let the Uncle Maurice see, for fear he might tell him ; though he is indeed good, and not *méchant*, as the silly ladies think. He comes not often to the churches, but he gives often to the poor."

There was neither incense nor lily perfume, as at St. Briac, but Miranda was conscious of a strange emotion as she knelt beside a Paulette with closed eyes and rosy lips moving rapidly. " His heart's desire is death," she said to herself. " For that how can I ask ? " Paulette, murmuring the carefully learnt words of litany to the " Capitaine de la Milice Céleste," was full of faith that, with this kind hand in hers, she was very near the heaven where her father waited. Miranda, still under the spell of *Pervenches*, half unconsciously echoed Victor de Verton's own longing that something of that dewy fresh-

ness might come back to the world-worn Maurice Préval ; and when a name is whispered in a secret prayer, it is, after all, apt to be of quite an earthly significance.

When Paulette's rapid mutterings ceased, she jumped up with a sigh of relief, and put little coquettish straightenings to her hat and frock, with the instinct of the born Parisienne. "I go now to my uncle, who smokes without, and we shall eat an omelette made by *la belle* Madame Poulard. Adieu."

Miranda still lingered. The cool loneliness suited her mood, and Daisy had wished to rest. How the child loved this cynic, and how well he understood her, she mused, with the smarting remembrance of his coldness to herself intruding unwelcomely.

Meanwhile, Daisy, without, was reflecting neither on the view nor on the historical associations. She was glad to be there, glad to show the friend who had been so neglectful for the last two days that she, too, could be independent. It had been dull at the Casino without him last night, and she hated showing how bad her French was, with all these foreigners. Herapath had deplored the fact that he was "obliged" to dine and play bridge at Mrs. Scott-Battersby's ; but why could



he not please himself in this, as in all other matters ?

Poor Daisy felt her old sense of being eclipsed by more showy personalities. She had no idea what Mrs. Scott-Battersby, alone with that terrible truth-teller, the looking-glass, felt at the sight of her own aging face. It is only the woman past youth who quite realizes its tremendous power. All the accomplishments and charms drawn up in battle array against it are apt to be so utterly in vain.

Daisy had not the faintest idea of supposing herself in love with this soft-voiced soldier. She was perfectly loyal to her husband in thought as in deed. But she enjoyed being admired and petted with an almost childish simplicity, and still believed each stale old compliment to be new-coined for her alone.

Préval stood leaning over the battlements a little above her, hidden from her sight, the tall soldierly figure, that had never lost the seal set by military service, outlined clearly against the sky, and a new expression of happiness on his face. He was a very strong man, and there was no trace in his frank blue Breton eyes of an almost sleepless night. Paulette had often begged him to write a little story "just for her," and

somehow he had pushed the scattered sheets of his novel aside, and, with the melody of "I know a bank" echoing in his brain, had made an exquisite little fairy tale. "It shall go to *Figaro Illustré* for Christmas, and Dumont shall draw my elves as he only can," was his decision.

It really seemed as if the sprites had taken possession of his study, waving their magic wands. It was a dream, compact of moonlight and dainty humour. The "good people" danced lightly across the empty white sheets, and, lo! they blossomed with flowers of airiest fancy. He had gone back to England for the scenery, and once more set fairies in the woods of Warwickshire—surely their last stronghold if but for Shakespeare's sake.

"Victor will approve of this bit of sentiment born of a song. For ten years past I have not had just that impetus to take my pen and write quickly. I might have been the boy who thought Paris a Garden of Eden and found it a wilderness. That girl's voice haunts me.

"Where oxlip and the nodding violet grows :  
There sleeps the fairy queen.

It is better than the shore *aride et solitaire*, where such as I walk vainly seeking pearls."

“My prayers are ended, my uncle,” remarked Paulette complacently, as she rejoined him. “And now let us eat our omelette, for it is time. Fear not that I shall become *dévôte*. The convent is only for the ugly ones who would be sad in the world. For me, I love it well. Yet if something very difficult is to be accomplished, one must go to the saints as I have been.”

Every one knows the famous kitchen of Madame Poulard, with rows of ever-tender chickens roasting on buttery spits before a glorious open fire; and Madame, still handsome and always full of a charming dignity, herself tossing the famous omelettes, of such prodigious size and invariable lightness. The smiling bows that ought to be a liberal education to the English tourists were nothing compared with her delighted ovation to Prével.

“Once again, dear Monsieur, my house is honoured indeed. Mademoiselle is your niece? Ah, but she is delicious. She shall have an omelette fit for a queen, were France so fortunate as to possess one. Do you recall, Monsieur, when you first came with Monsieur Dumont and the rest, how merry you were, and how you basted your own chickens with butter before supper?”

"And I will do it again. See, Paulette, thou didst not know thine uncle was *cuisinier*."

So it befell that when Miranda and Daisy looked into the picturesque place, full of such savoury odours, before going upstairs to the dining-room where every artist in France has left a sketch of the hostess as a gallant tribute of admiration, they beheld Prével on his knees, showing Paulette with what a lavish supply of melted butter true roast chicken is prepared by the genuine artist. He turned round and bowed to them, quite unabashed and smiling.

"I think you were a little mistaken about Monsieur Prével, because you did not know him," said Daisy wisely. "It is a pity he writes such horrid books, for look how un-self-conscious he is, and how he adores that child. I think it a great deal for a man not to be conceited. When you were in church some one was whistling 'I know a bank' most beautifully up higher. I believe it was he."

And if it really was, he had not disapproved of her song as of herself, reflected Miranda, as she said judicially, "The books are not all horrid, and perhaps my judgment is not infallible."

Even with Daisy she could not discuss *Per-*



*venches*, for Daisy scarcely understood literary raptures. She changed the subject by telling the story of Paulette and the golden heart.

"How funny French children are!" was Daisy's comment. "It sounds so saintly for a small girl of seven to give up her new locket. Yet Paulette is not at all too good to live."

"But children are at bottom always so much better than grown-ups. Daisy, when that little thing held my hand, and believed St. Michael, with his wings and jewelled armour, would take more account of words from me, I felt very humble."

Then the remembrance of her own prayer silenced her, for it almost looked as if it had already been answered.

## CHAPTER IX

### ON THE WAY TO ST. LUNAIRE

“IT is surely a gracious dispensation of Providence that the one modiste in Paris with the soul of an artist should have an establishment in Dinard for the season, permitting me to give all my leisure to the trousseau,” Madame de Verton had thankfully decided. “It is, alas ! beyond my slender means to bestow a fortune upon my niece, but Monsieur de Castel shall at least marry an *élégante*, if I cannot give him a beauty. Vainité will be aware that Yvonne is now worth pleasing. She has at times true inspiration. The costumes shall be few, but so many separate triumphs. For this much time and infinite patience are needed, and if I perish of fatigue it will signify nothing. My work will be accomplished.”

Absorbed in the difficult beginning, with this great end in view, the kindly old lady did not notice that Victor was looking much worse than

usual. "Terrible nights borne with the patience of a martyr, and I sworn to secrecy," Jules had inconsistently confided to Francine, who in her turn had promptly told her mistress. Miranda was full of silent pity, and it had gradually become customary with her to sit awhile beside the chair, drawn up in a shady nook in the garden, looking seaward, and sheltered with unkempt tamarisk.

In those salt-scented mornings she read to him in French or English, and learnt especially to love Rostand for the very comfort of his unrealities. "La Princesse Lointaine" seemed to embody that mysterious woman of Victor de Verton's white dreams, and he himself to be a far more pathetic Cyrano de Bergerac than the Gascon hero whom we have taken to our hearts. Once, when very pale and suffering, he had asked her to read two or three pages from *Pervenches*, and had wondered why a hard note had crept into the expressive voice that was one of her chief charms, as she complied. He did not know her fear of again letting tears fall over those pages, as in the magic dawn when she had first wondered over their beauty.

His knowledge of English amazed her. "It is your Browning, of all poets, who has helped

and cheered me most," he said once. "Sometimes beyond my understanding, but full of such a sure and glorious hope. See how he writes of death—with what courage ; and of the life beyond—with what certainty. The other poets mourn their lost love, where he but glories in its eternity.

"O thou soul of my soul, I *shall* clasp thee again,  
And with God be the rest.

How weak and morbid is Lamartine : ' Dans la nuit éternelle emporté sans retour.' It is comparing *eau sucrée* with a rich Italian wine. It was Maurice who first taught me to comprehend a little. I was almost in despair, and, see, here are the lines he marked long ago, when he first came to Paris. Read them to me, if it pleases you. I love to hear the English as it really is—so dignified, so finely cadenced."

"And what is our failure here but a triumph's evidence  
For the fulness of the days? Have we withered and  
agonised?  
Why else was the pause prolonged but that singing might issue  
thence?  
Why rushed the discords in but that harmony should be  
prized?  
Sorrow is hard to bear, and doubt is slow to clear ;  
Each sufferer says his say, his scheme of the weal and woe.  
But God has a few of us whom He whispers in the ear.  
The rest may reason and welcome : 'tis we musicians know."



"I have 'withered and agonised,'" repeated Victor, "and it is good to be so comprehended, so cheered. They say Browning is harsh and rugged, but what lovely lines sometimes, and what deep meaning always !

"All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good shall  
exist ;  
Not its semblance, but itself.

That is my gospel in spite of all.

"The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too  
hard,  
The passion that left the ground to lose itself in the sky,  
Are music sent up to God.

Not one of our own poets can speak like that strong man, fit hero of the romance of all literary romances. I remember when Maurice told me the story of his life. To have so many quiet hours to make the dead poets my living friends is one of my great compensations."

What change had come, then, to Miranda, once so tired of hearing of *Perfides*, that she listened so quietly, with such a soft look in her grey eyes, when he spoke of Préal ? De Verton caught that far-away expression, and a thought flashed into his brain : "This is the woman for Maurice, with her exquisite sympathy, her love

of literature. She is perfect as a friend ; but as a wife—— Ah, ‘in heaven there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage.’” She was reading “The Guardian Angel” at that moment, and the sharp pang of rebellion against his fate was helped by its great tenderness. His wonted resignation returned with the deepening sense of peace with which he was more and more familiar, and he could again feel the beauty of the summer, the sweetness of friendship.

Meanwhile, Daisy Mostyn had wandered along the cliff path towards St. Lunaire, winding past such a sequence of blue pictures of the sea, and green pictures of the wild land, rich with flowers, with a dominant colour note of purple and the coarse gold of the ragwort, mingled with the primrose yellows of the tall woolly mullein or the profuse orange-lipped toadflax.

Herapath had watched her start as he lounged upon the hotel balcony, smoking, in no very happy temper. His good fortune had set him free from uncomfortable debts, seeming small enough with this amazing three thousand pounds at his banker’s. But there was Mrs. Scott-Battersby and her worn-out past intruding un-

welcomely upon his pretty present pastime. If he had at once realized that Dot was troublesome chiefly because she needed money, he would have been much relieved. But, although for several years he had conveniently forgotten her existence, it never occurred to him that she had done the same.

If Herapath considered himself irresistible, it arose largely from the foolishness of those who had found him so. Spoilt at home as a pretty child, spoilt later as a pretty boy when he was by far the best-looking subaltern of his regiment, his complete selfishness had been the growth due to sedulous fostering on the part of a most mischief-making class of woman. Such as these absurdly think to keep their own youth by clutching the callow hearts insurgent, new to insidious flattery. Herapath was a good soldier, but his seemingly successful career had been ruined because of the moulding of his character by these adroit hands, destructive of all the finer qualities.

He had avoided dangerous tête-à-têtes at the Villa Souriante, and now held in his hand a note from Dot, written on scented paper in her well-known sprawling hand : "I shall expect you at three o'clock. If you do not come, you know

the consequences." It was precisely because he did not know them that he feared them. Clearly there was some explanation to be got over. Explanations were detestable, yet they seemed unavoidable. She was jealous, he supposed. In the old days that had been one of her marked weaknesses. He was a fool to let her trouble him, and he would go for a walk and forget her.

Ten minutes later he was beside Daisy on the cliff path, and had thrust every unpleasant thought comfortably aside. Such conversations as theirs would be insufferably bald if ever they had a third cool listener. They depend so immensely on looks, pauses, and an effective emphasis. That he should ask pardon for having seemed to neglect her for the dullest of dull dinners, would have been audacious had she been quicker to see what it implied. She liked to hear that she was looking charming; she liked to hear him plead for dances at the masked ball, and plead harder still to know the colour of the domino she was to wear.

"It must be most awfully slow for you in the country in the winter. By Jove! you ought to be in India, the belle of a big station."



Because she listened, and because she was not displeased, Mark Herapath fancied that he was all the world to her—an illogical deduction enough, which would have made Miranda smile. Unfamiliar with women of Daisy's type, he measured her by the standard of those he knew, to be utterly at fault in his conclusions. He thought how pleasant it would be to see more of her than just these scanty meetings. He would have asked any one else he had ever known to go on to St. Lunaire to lunch, and to drive back in the cool of the afternoon; yet he did not do this. The tennis week and the masked ball offered surer chances, and he contented himself with persuading her to confess that the domino was to be mauve.

"You may not have noticed that, although Miranda is bigger than I am, we are almost the same height. Every one knows mauve is *her* pet colour, so I shall wear it, and perhaps be taken for her—until I speak French, that is."

"Your eyes are much more beautiful than hers," Herapath said, with a convincing air of telling the plain truth which was peculiarly his own. "She is a little too clever for me. I admire another style—always have."

But this was a mistake. Daisy was sweet-naturedly loyal to all her friends, and to this one especially. "Then it only shows you have very little taste," she retorted quite crossly. "Miranda is very, very clever, but she is never conceited or horrid. No one in the world has been kinder to me, and if it had not been for her I should never have come here at all."

Absurdly misconstruing this remark into a confession that to be at St. Enogat was altogether delightful, for reasons in which he took the leading part, Herapath was satisfied to go on alone and let her return to the hotel. He did not ask himself precisely what he wanted, or face the ugliness of the truth that it was to hear her say that she had forgotten her husband because she could only remember him. Idleness and a pretty woman were his recipes for pleasure, if there was no sport available, and that place and person should change with circumstances was an essential to these episodes. Unexpectedly enough, this inexperienced girl had supplied some new developments. He could almost believe she had never flirted before.

And Daisy? Daisy, wondering and afraid, was thinking, "If he ever cared for any one, how terribly sad it would be for him. It does

seem hard that, because of that awful marriage, he can never be happy." That this frank, handsome soldier should go about trying to win hearts as he might have tried to win a game of polo, was an aspect of the case little likely to present itself to her. Had it done so, she would have shrunk back with an immediate wholesome sense of repulsion.

So Herapath wandered on without much appreciation of the charm of the walk or the flat prettiness of the Plage at St. Lunaire, trying so hard to exalt itself to be a miniature Dinard. The tide was low, and tennis courts marked in all directions on the hard sands, where players of every age shrieked dramatically when they missed the ball, frequent as was that occurrence.

He felt thoroughly bored, and in no mood to respond to the glances of a stout siren of fifty, dressed—or, rather, undressed—as a *pêcheuse*, carrying her net in one plump hand, and wearing a coquettish sailor hat set at an engaging angle above her careful curls. Even a group of portly gentlemen gaily dancing in a ring in about two inches of water gave him no amusement whatever. Lunch on the hotel terrace was little better. His own company was detestable. Daisy, with that becoming cloud of misty white veiling round

her delicate face, would have looked so dainty seated opposite.

Punctually at three o'clock, Dot Scott-Battersby was elaborately arrayed in one of those excessively loose tea gowns which seem to be made chiefly to suggest an uncomfortable tightness beneath them. As she put deft touches to her nose with her powder puff, she saw Herapath coming up the weedy path of the villa she was to occupy until her serious civilian husband returned home for good, to be rudely awakened from his dreams concerning England. The tawdry little sitting-room was overfull of photographs, chiefly of men in uniform, and irritatingly encumbered with scraps of dusty drapery, and pigs and cats in the cheap pottery for which quaint is too merciful an adjective. The rose-coloured blinds created a becoming false light, in which, however, yesterday's sweet peas drooped depressed, as if they could not be happy in an atmosphere all scent and stale cigarettes.

When the door was shut upon them, Mrs. Scott-Battersby laughed loudly, whilst he wondered such a laugh had ever been endurable.

"My dear Mark, don't look so frightened. I only wrote that note for fun. When you found me at St. Enogat we were both so bored we were



almost glad to see each other. You said quite a lot of pretty things when we were sittin' on that Casino terrace that first evenin', and if I hadn't been losin' an awful lot at those stupid little horses I might have been quite impressed. Only since you got hold of little Nitouche, as the Frenchmen call her, you've been cool, not to say rude, to me. That was always your way, and silly idiots liked you to show downright bad manners to all the rest except just themselves. It made us feel superior. Now that child in the badly made piqué skirts has actually tried to back up her friend in showin' they don't want my acquaintance. As if either of them were worth knowin' themselves. That old de Verton woman's a cat too. Tried to keep me out of the tableaux till they found they couldn't get 'Tou-Tou' or his francs without me. That small upstart, Daisy Mostyn, hasn't been civil. I wonder how it would be if I went and told her that once upon a time, at an out-of-the-way station in India——"

Hera path actually grew pale, but he was silent, and she continued, "We had luck, Mark, to have done as we did without any big scandal. Never to have been found out even by poor old Tom, was what doesn't often happen. Do you

remember half the things you swore? If you told the truth you'd say, 'No,' but you never have told it, and never will. I remember it all. Women don't forget."

Hera path imagined he saw his chance, and seized it. His vanity, as usual, came to the rescue, and he thought her relenting.

"You were always far better to me than I deserved, Dot, and I think we ought to be friends."

"Look here, Mark, you don't understand. It's just because I don't forget that I find myself despising you as I never despised any one. Forty-five, and just as you were at twenty. There's no fool like an old fool, and that you might say it to me doesn't make it any less true of yourself."

Hera path scarcely listened. His attention was painfully concentrated on one point. "Am I to understand that you intend to give away yourself and me, just to make Mrs. Mostyn wretched by finding out what sort I am? Well, she knows that I'm no saint. I am honest to that point."

"So that you could be beggin' and prayin' her to be your friend and forgive you, and all the rest. *Vieux jeu*, Mark. You haven't learnt a new move." She laughed again, and it jarred

even more harshly upon Herapath than before. There was chivalry in the man for all his weakness.

“Mrs. Mostyn is as good as they are made—quite different——”

“Different from me, because when I was a girl I was for ever meetin’ men like you, and she has had the luck to live with another sort. Well, now that I’ve frightened you a bit, you may take this comfort. I shall tell her nothin’, because I detest her, and because it will be amusin’ enough to see her as silly as I was in my time. Keep on long enough with those ‘want-to-be-a-good-boy’ airs of yours, teach her all we know if you care to take the trouble, and I’ll sit lookin’ on.”

The drawling voice was very scornful, and Herapath was almost tempted into the straight path by her contempt. To leave St. Enogat was to settle the question; but then, he did not want to go. He tried another tack.

“Look here, Dot, I know you’ve had a bad time with the baccarat. It makes me feel beastly. My luck’s turned at last. Do let me be your banker and give you a fresh start—for auld lang syne.”

Dot sighed. “I’ve done most things in my time,

and, though I hate this, there's no help for it. Tom sent me my quarterly allowance, and nearly every cent of it is gone, and bills pourin' in. To begin to tell Tom at this end would be too rough on him."

"Give me the bills, and I'll see to them ; and come and have a little flutter to-night. Come, you were fond of me once."

She went to a writing-table and pulled out a bundle of papers, which she thrust into his hand. "Needs must. 'Tou-Tou' has grown stingy, little wretch that he is. But one thing I've got to rub well in before you go. I'm not fond of you now, and there's nothin' in my life I hate like the thought of the time when I believed in you. But I'm gettin' old. When the paint's all off, and I see myself, it makes me wild to know I've got to be ugly or else ridiculous. When you saw me that first night you didn't notice things much, but in the mornin' I saw in your eyes how I looked. *She's* got a young husband and children. If my baby had lived I might have been different, but I left her with the ayah to go ridin' and dancin' with you. It's all so unfair. She has so much more than her own share, and nothin' left for me. Think of my cheery future—a little house at Lewes or



Hastin's, and a few old tabbies comin' callin', and evenin's at home with Tom. If I were a good woman I should preach a bit, and say, 'Leave the poor child alone.' As I'm not, I'll tell you she doesn't care twopence for you, but that she will if you are not past tryin'. You look quite young, too. That's such a shame. You make toys of us, and then, when the gildin's rubbed off a bit, you go and get a new one, and we're done for. Some day your time will come, but I can see you lookin' in that glass and feelin' it's not yet. I'll take your money. You owe me somethin'. But I won't trouble you with more of my company. Go and think over what I've been sayin', if you ever *do* think of anythin' except yourself."

Hera path put the bills in his pocket and went back to his own room to draw cheques very consolatory to more than one anxious dress-maker, with the sense of relief that proved the existence of some battered remnant of a conscience.

He strolled towards Dinard when he had posted them, with a virtuous resolution to avoid the baccarat rooms, which he kept for once, as they proved to be closed at that hour.

He could hardly be blamed for looking in a moment at the *bal d'enfants* in full progress at the Casino. Paulette and Fi-Fi, in brief skirts of black tulle, with white shoes, and immense white bows in their black curls, were leading the "Washington Post" with the calmness of those well versed in the ways of society; and Miranda, Daisy, and Madame de Verton sat looking on with interest. Of course, Herapath joined them, justifying his coming by a petition to Paulette that she would give him a dance.

"Impossible—my regrets," said that veteran. "See, I have refused already all these messieurs. They are so jealous if I dance with one and not the rest." She waved her gloved hand towards a mournful group of bare-legged, close-cropped boys ranging from five to ten. "Also they dance atrociously, and I love them not at all."

"Then you will not marry, ma'mselle," said Herapath gravely.

"But certainly. A husband is a necessity. Only a *dame mariée* can wear the diamonds. But I shall be like Madame Mostyn. I shall leave the *mari* at home. She does admirably here without him. She will dance with you if you desire it."

But Daisy declined firmly. The child's words had made her thoughtful, and Miranda was comforted by her decision to go home to tea. Mrs. Sturge was a troublesome woman; yet, with such an unexceptional chaperon as Madame de Verton, they could surely appear anywhere. To her it was perfectly natural that Daisy should be admired as she had the full right to be, and she herself had become very fond of the bright, witty old lady.

"Now that Yvonne's prospects smile in a manner so enchanting, how gladly would I assist you with a trousseau, *chère* Mademoiselle. Ah, if our dear de Castel had but a brother—as his sons, *hélas!* must marry money."

"Make rather a marriage for me, *ma tante*," suggested Paulette. But let it not be an English milord. There was one upon the Plage—the little Geoffrey. I loved him well, and he said to me, to Paulette, that he played never with the girls. Imagine what a bear! Nor will I such a one as Monsieur 'Tou-Tou.' He is of most ordinary manners, and Camille recounts me horrors of him. Find me a *parti* such as the Uncle Maurice. He is ancient, but he is still *beau garçon*, and he can sympathise—ah, but adorably. He has imparted a secret to me of

a present he has made for the fête of Victor, a surprise of the most charming."

The faithful Fi-Fi summoning her to the dance, the pair whirled lightly away on their small, preposterous high heels.

"The way these infants talk is truly terrible," said Madame de Verton. "The mother of that one was the prettiest woman in Paris, and Paulette is her image. But the little treasure has a good heart, though she is already *franche coquette*, and that detestable Madame Edmond Préal abandoned her lovely *bébé* and is away to America with her millionaire, a man of the most *bourgeois*. And Maurice himself, with all his genius, has been unfortunate in affairs of the heart. All his best years he waited for a person of the temperament of ice. She permitted his respectful homage, ah, but yes, and gave him *bonjour* as soon as she was free. In effect, it made him what you call woman-hater, and it is in vain that for all these years I propose marriages of the most irreproachable. Very gladly would I have given him Yvonne, but she is perhaps better suited to Monsieur de Castel, and his family makes the alliance all I could desire. For us of the old régime the Paris of to-day is deplorable. You in England can at least be thankful you



have a King of charm and of a tact enormous, a Queen who knows how to dress, and who is *belle femme par excellence*. All this, with a nursery populated with stout princes, should console you even for your fogs."

## CHAPTER X

### MARSH ASTERS

“**T**O-MORROW is my birthday, and I make a little fête, at which I pray you and Madame Mostyn to assist,” said Victor de Verton one day. “I have promised to take Paulette and Fi-Fi a drive to Le Guildo, and to make a picnic of our déjeuner there upon the grass by the ruined castle. My aunt comes also, with Yvonne, if the poor child is allowed any freedom. It appears that she has to pass hours with Madame Vainité in August, that her costumes may be complete by October. To a man that is incomprehensible, but I suppose it is necessary.”

Miranda had accepted this invitation with a private thrill of pleasure, for Le Guildo was described in *Pervenches*, and was the setting of the story she loved most of all.

“Your birthplace on your birthday is appropriate,” she had commented, recalling that night

upon the boat, when his friendship, now very dear to her, had been made so quickly.

“Not at Le Guildo itself did my poor mother shed tears over me. She was an angel to her son until she left me very desolate. Our château is a few miles away from the little town. I cannot show it to you, as I could wish, for my sister-in-law loves not to see me when she is there. My brother is of the best, but she—she shrinks from me, as, after all, is natural. But I go often in winter, and the old servants wait on me with care, and the friendly dogs keep me from feeling lonely. Last year I went at the holy Christmas, because I felt I could bear no company but the spirit of my mother, who might come to the home of her child. There was much snow and ice, and two of our brave *gardes-chasse* carried me up the steep, slippery hill to Notre Dame that I might not miss the midnight mass. It is to me so infinitely more solemn than the crowded churches in Paris, and the rude figures of that Nativity set forth so roughly, carry the soul to Bethlehem when one prays only with the poor who believe. Then, too, my people know me, and they do not regard me.”

If Daisy Mostyn had not been especially

anxious to see Le Guildo, her compassion for Victor made her conceal prettily enough that country excursions were little to her taste. She had not begun to tire of the gaiety of bright, toy-like Dinard, but snatched at all the commonplace little pleasures there, so new to her, as if to make the most of every hour. She thrust aside the thought of England and the trials of domesticity ; yet all the time she was wishing, oftener than she knew, that Archie could see her with her hair in this new way, and these soft chiffon veils fluttering round her face. She wanted to look like that at home, without understanding that the change was far more the effect of the confidence in herself, due to a little admiration, than that of any finery. To be thought pretty is almost to become so.

Dot Scott-Battersby took a bitter pleasure in noting that Mark Herapath was acting on her advice. He had decided to give a lunch at St. Malo, and was irritated to hear from Daisy that they were going to Le Guildo upon the day for which he had confidently made preparations.

“ It’s awfully good of Miss Ricordan to be so kind to that poor little chap, but he ought not to expect to monopolise you both. Couldn’t you let Madame de Verton chaperon her, and come



and keep me company ? It's so dull to go about alone. And we could see that island where some Frenchman or other is buried—an awfully pretty place, too cheery for a tombstone."

But Daisy did not respond as he wished ; and to be with Miranda was to learn something.

"If you do not even know Chateaubriand's name, you would not be much of a guide ; and I'm very interested in Le Guildo."

Herapath laughed, and said meaningly, "You are a little hypocrite, Mrs. Mostyn. I know you'd sooner sit and listen to the band at the Casino than see all the sights in Brittany. I'm not much of a hand at it myself. Stay at home and just stop in the garden till it gets cool at Dinard, and then have pity on a lonely man at one of the tea places."

But Daisy was as obdurate as she was surprised. She suddenly realized that she should like his programme much better than the drive, and was almost frightened at her own feelings.

"Miss Ricordan is a better friend than you are, Mrs. Mostyn ; and why you won't trust yourself to me I can't see."

"It is not that," said Daisy untruthfully. "It is that I really want to go with the others."

Herapath tried a fresh mode of attack. "Of course I was only joking. I have no sort of claim upon your kindness, and you have given me far more of your society than I could ever deserve. You know what a deplorable mess I've made of my life, and you can understand that there are times when I feel rather miserable. I shall have to leave soon, but I've promised to do my share in this masked affair, and unless Mauve Domino is going to break her word as to dances, I suppose I shall."

With this Herapath had sauntered away, leaving Daisy to wish she had never told him about the domino, to sigh over his loneliness, and yet to be glad that such a perfect partner was at her disposal. She loved dancing for its own sake, and to sit apart and watch others whirling about to the music was a severe trial to her at any time. At home she had perhaps anticipated the solitary ball for weeks, only to find a scarcity of men, and herself a forlorn wallflower. What wonder that she should be flattered to be so petitioned for the favours she was in reality glad to accord?

The weaker Victor de Verton grew, the more determined he seemed to be to enjoy all he could. That morning he had driven out to

St. Briac to Maurice Préval's villa, where the aniline-hued asters were now showing their bold rosettes of purple and crude pink. The asters are the last regiment of summer's guard of flowers ; and when their frilled heads droop and the dahlias flaunt above them, we know that autumn has come, and feel that all this flush of scarlet and gold cannot quite console us.

When he arrived, he found that his friend had gone to bathe, and, with permitted freedom, glanced at the writing-table. There was, however, no confusion of loose sheets in Préval's fine, clear writing, and the old housekeeper announced that Monsieur had been out early in his canoe. Victor established himself to wait in his chair outside with a volume of Shakespeare, and smiled to find it open at *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Presently Préval came up the garden whistling, with an air of contentment and high health which was very striking. He gave de Verton an even more than usually cordial welcome, and himself tenderly carried him in to the little living-room, as was his custom whenever they were alone together. The contrast was more marked than usual, for Préval looked as if all this air and sunshine had made a renaissance for

his youth, and dark shadows beneath darker eyes told that Victor had passed one of his worst nights of pain and sleeplessness.

Madelon, the cook, had not been idle, and sent in a repast which, from fresh prawns as a *hors d'œuvre* to a fine melon as dessert, was faultless. They talked cheerfully ; but not until the fragrant coffee came did either speak of what was uppermost in their thoughts, although reticence is the rarest of all characteristics with Frenchmen, and this friendship was of what an Englishman would have regarded as an almost feminine intimacy.

"I have not forgotten that to-morrow is thy birthday, *mon vieux*," said Prével, as he made dim blue smoke-rings with his cigarette. "The fairies used their magic wands over me the other night, and I shall offer you a little tale they told me. *La Rosée* is a dream ; but, Victor, it was sweet just for a moment to recapture the lost joy of other years."

Victor took the roll of manuscript eagerly. "Truly all Paris could not provide a gift I should value half as much. To-morrow I keep my fête with Paulette and Fi-Fi at Le Guildo. Make it perfect by joining us there, and giving the children the joy of hearing you read it. You



will not refuse, because, Maurice, I came to tell you that I think—I hope—it will be for the last time on earth.”

“No, Victor, do not say it. You have lived thirty-two years. There is no reason why a life so precious to one friend, at least, should not be prolonged. I should be very lonely without you.”

Victor smiled. With his cruel deformity mercifully hidden by a covering, only the positive beauty of his clear-cut features remained. “It is no imagination, Maurice,” he continued calmly. “Those good doctors in London signed my death warrant, and you would not wish to deprive the prisoner of what is only his order of release. You are not sure, as I am, of the power of prayer; yet here in my hand is its direct answer. How many times have I petitioned that you should win back something of the dew and freshness of the morning! Is there no charming message in the very title, *La Rosée*? I believe that a new day is dawning for you, when you will forget the past, and cherish a wife beside you, and, it may be, hear the laughter of children in your empty house. With the death angel so near, a sort of second sight comforts me in saying farewell to the

truest, best of friends. Let Paris go mad over *Perfides*. To me the man is better than the books."

With a heavy heart Préval promised to be at Le Guildo the next day; but when the time came that solemn impression had diminished. Doctors were often wrong, and Victor's health had always been so fragile.

Madame de Verton was not of the party, after all.

"Yvonne is of an indifference positively criminal as to her toilettes. To-day is the first trying on of the marriage robe itself. I dare postpone it no longer. My presence is imperative. For the corsage, yes; for the skirt, certainly, Vainité is to be trusted; but not the sleeve. There a critic is essential. Even that terrible Madame Sturge will not find it unsuitable that you conduct Madame Mostyn and Mademoiselle Ricordan, with the children. Take also Francine, that there be no scandal if the *bonne* of Paulette shares the second carriage with that chatterbox Jules. Francine is a treasure, and will see that you starve not."

So it befell that Paulette and Fi-Fi, in high spirits and poppy-laden hats, were allowed to sit side by side on the box, whilst Victor shared the

large, easy carriage with Miranda and Daisy. It was a glorious August day, and the appealing charm of the inland country was more potent, as it always is, after a time of sojourn by the sea. The broad green fields, snug farms, and laden fruit trees acquire a new beauty, and the little streams, fringed with willow herb and water mint, and the odorous meadowsweet the French children call "meadow queen," look fertile after the wide rock-strewn sand stretches. There was promise of a profuse blackberry feast a little later, and the scent of traveller's joy was everywhere. The waste lands blazed with ragwort and fleabane, with "Red Admiral"-haunted clumps of the dull hemp agrimony, which gorgeous butterflies appear to love inexplicably.

"Ah, Victor," said Paulette, leaning backwards so far that her nurse shrieked frantically from the carriage behind, wherein she and Francine and Jules kept up a concerted trio of shrill talk, "it is well at times to contemplate *la belle nature*. To be ever on the Plage shows a want of *chic*. This day we shall be missed. Also we had new hats for the fête, and I was very weary of all my wardrobe, so well known throughout Dinard."

Victor de Verton looked much better after some hours of peaceful sleep, and was in excellent spirits.

"The hats are enchanting," he said gravely, "and as we have a distinguished gentleman coming to lunch, they will not be wasted."

"Who is it, then? Not Monsieur 'Tou-Tou,' I beg of you, or Monsieur the English officer, who treats me as if I were a *bébé*, which is entirely absurd. He beheld me taking the air with my aunt on the terrace at the Casino after dinner, and had the temerity to ask why was I not in my bed."

"It is neither of them, *mon bijou*; be relieved."

"Then it is the Uncle Maurice," she cried, wriggling joyfully. "He will well observe our hats."

"This time you have guessed rightly. And he is not only coming, but he brings me the present all shall share."

"Bonbons?" said the plump Fi-Fi, who was frankly greedy. "Let us trust he has sent to Paris for novelties. With those of Dinard I am so familiar."

"Something far better. A fairy tale he has written for me, which he will read to you."

Paulette looked aggrieved.



"Then this is the surprise of which he told me. But it is not well of the Uncle Maurice. I have prayed him with tears even to make me such a story, and he does it not. Thou art too old for fairies, Victor. It is the children they love—above all, the little girls who are not too ugly."

"But, my Paulette, when Uncle Maurice makes a story, it is for all the world. Think how beautiful that is. Not only to take you and Fi-Fi to fairyland, but thousands of others—the little ones in pain in the hospital as well as the happy ones making forts on the Plage."

"In England they say that the gates of fairyland are all of ivory and of gold, but that they only open when little hands touch them," said Miranda.

"I will take you very safely myself," interposed Paulette, "for I loved well that you recounted of Titania and Oberon. What a pity we have not our costumes! We could dance in the ruins there at Le Guildo, and make the peasants believe the real fairies had come back. I know we are too large, but they may be ignorant, and not aware that in England, at least, the fairies sleep in the cowslips as we swing in our hammocks. As to Fi-Fi, she is a gourmande."

But Fi-Fi was a stolid small person, and indifferent to abuse. To be the chosen friend of Paulette was a high honour, and to be dressed like her, in a coat of holland, was positive ecstasy, though it only accentuated the fact that she had but prettiness to compare with Paulette's actual beauty of starry eyes and plentiful curls.

Le Guildo is one of those places with which the first view is love at first sight. Perhaps to see it once is to see it best of all, sitting beside its blue river arm of the blue sea, with Notre Dame on its green conical hill, and that hoary ruined castle, which looks as if it must be hung with legends even more thickly than with ivy. It is not the least of the charms of Le Guildo that the guide-books seem to have nothing to say about it. And if Gilles de Bretagne really lived in the château, it does not appear easy to find out how he occupied himself there.

Miranda looked about her with delight, quite ready to use her imagination to make traditions for herself. The whole picturesqueness is redoubled by the suddenness with which the sharply curving road reveals it. Le Guildo, set amid green fields and embracing waters, has almost an air of unreality. It would be no sur-

prise to meet a gay cortège of knights and ladies riding one by one down the narrow road from the castle.

They were to picnic quite near it in a shady copse, and Victor was left to feast his eyes on the view he loved best in all the world, whilst the servants laid the lunch, and Daisy and Miranda carried off Fi-Fi and Paulette to explore the ruins. He could hear their rippling laughter for a long time in the clear air, and presently saw them upon the spit of land beneath, covered at certain tides by salt waves.

He remembered how, long ago, in his childhood, a famous botanist had shown him the grey flowers of the marsh aster, living and flourishing despite those waters of Marah which periodically flow over it. He had thought that, in the garden of the world, such as he resembled those insignificant, perfumeless blossoms, and had timidly told the kind-eyed scientist of his fancy. "From such as the marsh aster, cultivation has evolved some of the most radiant flowers," had been the smiling reply ; so that when Paulette ran back to give him the bouquet she had made, the humble marsh asters looked from their gayer neighbours with a message all their own.

She lingered only for an instant. "I see him ! I see him !" was her cry, and in another moment Préval was greeting the friend who felt a little guilty now that he had to break the news as to the coming of Miranda and Daisy.

As he hesitated, Paulette came to the rescue. "The Aunt de Verton and Yvonne have had to remain behind to try on the marriage robe itself, and, instead, Madame Mostyn and Mademoiselle Ricordan have come, and Ma'mselle has recounted us of all sorts of histories of the castle. Not true, you comprehend, but much gayer than the truth — of beautiful princesses and their cavaliers. Here they come, with Fi-Fi. The great wreaths of clematis I have made for them suit them well, *hein ?*"

It was too late for protest, but not too late for Victor to murmur hurriedly, "They have been so good to me, I could but offer some simple entertainment. And Maurice, Mademoiselle Ricordan will understand *La Rosée*. Let this birthday be all happiness for me."

With her wide hat, garlanded with traveller's joy, her white dress, and white hands full of flowers, there was nothing left of the mocking Alice of *Perfides*. Stray sunbeams, piercing the shimmering leaves overhead, just touched the



golden tendrils of her hair, and the innocent joy of life in the rich summer shone in her eyes. Daisy, beside her, lacked fire and colour. She did not then look Titania, for the prosaic reasons that she was hungry and tired. Miranda had plunged into her story of the olden times in order not to think of this distracting present. She, who had never known shyness, knew it now to its utmost, and it was Daisy who smiled first upon the new-comer—Daisy, with that illogical pleasure in knowing a notability quite compatible with ignorance of his works. When an English girl chooses, she can be unapproachable, and, recalling her secret mortification on the night of the dance, Miranda responded coldly to Préval's salutations, and tried to check an absurd happiness because they bore no trace of that unforgettable icy politeness.

She hurried away to direct the laying of the lunch, and to suppress Fi-Fi in the act of tasting a mayonnaise of crab with her fingers, in order to assure herself whether it was fish, flesh, or fowl. The meal was a merry one, and if the children partook of every dish, it was apparently the custom of the country ; if the three servants did not scruple to join in the conversation, that, too, can be done in France, where familiarity

and respect make an incongruous yet completely successful alliance.

It was Paulette, most precocious of feminists, who raised her glass and drank "to the health of our dear Victor."

"Drink also, *bijou*, to my happiness, and I shall have a joyful new year," he had rejoined.

Miranda, touching her wine with lips that quivered, saw that Préval was very quiet for a moment. He knew, then, that Victor might never feel the frosts of another winter, might even go all peacefully to his rest before the leaves fell softly to the ground. The merry children and the chattering servants, enjoying the various delicacies noisily, made their silence unregarded. But their eyes met, and, in that meeting, the sharing of a common secret brought them nearer together than they had ever been before.

Miranda had heard that Maurice Préval had been in vain offered great sums to give lectures and readings of his books in America; yet she forgot the fact when, as they grouped themselves in a green, shadowy corner, he took out the little manuscript. The so-called literary "world" was but a poor, dusty place of struggle and envy

and disappointment, compared with this other of warm stillness, with the full luxuriance of dreamy summer at its zenith.

The children had nestled near the reader, a little sleepy and subdued. Miranda sat beside Victor's chair, with Daisy resting against a mossy boulder. She understood French well enough to be as charmed as Paulette and Fi-Fi with this fairy paradise of dew-wet roses, where the "horns of elf-land faintly blowing" made music in their ears, and her pleasure was quite as simple.

But to Miranda and Victor there was the added delight of full appreciation of the exquisite style. *La Rosée* is already a classic. Even in its clumsier English dress it has captivated our imaginations. The children know it and its lovely pictures everywhere. It needs no quotation, because it is too brief to dare to make it briefer. Miranda's whole face was lit by a keen joy in this perfection not all intellectual. It seemed like a beautiful impossibility that she should be there, hearing the first novelist in Europe read something as yet altogether unknown for just these two or three listeners.

At the end there was a pause, and then the

imperative voice of Paulette : "Tell us more, my uncle. It is not enough."

"Ah, Paulette, the fairies come and go. They only stay with us ancient ones for an instant. They flutter away on their gossamer wings."

Daisy had her little speech ready, and Préval smiled his thanks.

"Miranda, for you, with your perfect French, not to say one word, was really too bad," was her comment when they reached home at tea-time.

"Are you quite sure I said *nothing*?" asked Miranda, almost wistfully.

"Quite certain, because I made sure you would say such nice things that just 'Merci!' would do for me."

"How stupid he must think me," she reflected sorrowfully, forgetting what a keen observer was Maurice Préval, and not divining that he had guessed that she had been touched by his story beyond any power of expression.

The thought of her absorbed face, the very fragrance of the fading wreath of traveller's joy, haunted him persistently. He fell to work late at night upon the savage satire on Society now nearing its dismal end. But his pen was for once rebellious; his mind wandered. Sunny Le



Guido mocked at his reiteration that all was vanity ; for if there is evil, there is good, and the tree of knowledge bears fruit of *both* kinds, though the pessimist insists that only the bitter is gathered by the hand of experience.

## CHAPTER XI

### A COLUMN OF THE "MORNING STAR"

**C**URIOSITY is not precisely a vice, but those who possess it in excess are tiresome people, quite deserving of their invariable unpopularity. With Mrs. Sturge it amounted to a ruling passion, if such a phrase could be used at all of a tepid temperament such as hers. She had a mind so small as to be fit only to take in details ; and as life is made up of them, it was kept uselessly busy. To ferret out the pettiest mystery delighted her, and she daily scrutinized the unpacking of the postman's bag, as if she were a detective on the watch for precious evidence.

She had, so far, kept her implied promise not to reveal the identity of George Everard Stokes with Miranda Ricordan ; but, observing that she daily received a copy of the *Morning Star*, she arrived at the just conclusion that she was connected with it. She next proceeded to read it attentively, and to seek vainly for paragraphs

concerning that Dinard which was such a big world to one whose horizon was bounded for ten months of the year by the damp confines of a village in fen-land. If she found anything in the *Star* of which she or Mrs. Medlicott disapproved, they promptly decided that Miranda had written it—a disadvantage of the anonymity of the Press with which all journalists are but too well acquainted.

Just when the tennis week had crowded the Beau Séjour to its dingiest garret, her patience was at last rewarded. She hastened excitedly to the garden to call down Mrs. Medlicott's ever-ready speaking-trumpet, "Now do look at this, and see if you do not consider it most unladylike conduct on the part of that Miss Ricordan;" and the word "that," with this particular inflection, is a kind of shibboleth among women for a thinly veiled dislike.

The article in question was headed "A Great Novelist at Work," and consisted of two columns of trivial gossip concerning Maurice Préval. Mrs. Sturge was far too vulgar herself to be struck by the vulgarity of the style, but upon the reiterated suggestion that the new book would be "startling" she fastened like a cat upon a mouse. The villa at St. Briac was fully

described, with copious comments upon the food and raiment of the author of *Perfidies*. There were headlines to introduce his boots, and italics to make the dinner menu conspicuous. "Partial to fresh fruit" was leaded as if it were war news, and "He writes with quills" might have been the announcement of the dissolution of Parliament.

The silliness and impudent note of intimacy made it insufferable, garnished as it was with a superfluity of adjectives, and characterised by a superb indifference to grammar. Mrs. Sturge was not aware that there were four misquotations from Prével's books, and every kind of mistake and confusion as to their dates and sequence. Fraser Micklethwaite had taken brief leave of absence for some necessary political business, and the sub-editor, facing the August scarcity of stimulating copy, had thankfully printed every word of the results of an hour's conversation between that "dear connection" of Mrs. Medlicott's, Harold Fodderby, and the loquacious valet of Victor de Verton. For, however indifferent the British public may be as to reading the best books, there can be no question of its interest in little frivolous personalities concerning those who write them.



Jules was an honest fellow, quite devoted to his master, but he passed existence in a not unsuccessful quest for good listeners, and was the last man living to lose such a chance as Fodderby had given him, coupled as it was with the gift of a choice cigar. He had fully answered every question, and was almost unaware that, in doing so, he had drawn largely upon his own lively imagination. The hours he spent at Briac were to him particularly dull except at those meal times which manifested the great talents of the ill-favoured cook. The greedy fellow had attributed to Préval his own sentiments as to mayonnaises and terrines, so that those readers of the *Morning Star* who were partial to anecdotage might imagine the novelist a veritable Brillat Savarin, assuming the improbability that they had ever heard of such a person. There were also some gross exaggerations of the vast sums of money realized by the novels, concluding with the baseless announcement that Maurice Préval had taken a flat at Savoy Mansions, from whence he would shortly expose the fearful moral decadence of English Society.

Mrs. Medlicott devoured every word of it eagerly, and then spoke: "Those de Vertons ought to be told of this, for there can be no

doubt she wrote it. They *seem* respectable, and that unfortunate deformity is for ever giving Miss Ricordan picnics and drives. There is something very deceitful about it all, and, depend upon it, she would not want her writing kept a secret unless she were ashamed of it, as she well may be. For my part, I have never liked it; and I did not think she showed a spirit of appreciation of darling Kitty's great talents."

"Oh, that, of course, was pure jealousy. But *I* think her head has been turned, like that silly little Mrs. Mostyn's. Both, if you please, are asked to the masked ball, with two lords on the committee; and when I suggested to them that Miss Medlicott would have no objection to attend it, they declared they could not even ask Major Herapath for a card for her."

"I don't know what we are coming to in this dreadful age," lamented Mrs. Medlicott. "What with these writing people getting quite into Society, and these horrid young married flirts monopolizing all the men, really nice girls are left out in the cold, unless they dress like actresses or behave like grooms."

"Very true," said Mrs. Sturge, with wandering attention. "But, as I see that chair under the trees, I will take over this paper and tell the

truth, as I feel with you it is only my duty, and duty, as you know, is a thing I never shirk."

If we all enjoyed doing disagreeable things under this mistaken name as thoroughly as Mrs. Sturge, the little foxes would indeed spoil the sweetest grapes.

Victor de Verton, trying to forget a crushing headache with the help of *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*, was amazed when she abruptly asked him how he was feeling, and, thinking in his humility that he had been hard upon her, he answered with even more than his usual gentle courtesy. He was greatly surprised to see her sit down beside him, and wholly unprepared for the shock that followed.

As he was known to speak English so fluently, Mrs. Sturge had nothing to debar her from the comfort of a carefully elaborated story. She explained that Miranda had herself told her she was a journalist, living quite alone in London in a very Bohemian manner, and added that she went about to try to meet people with a view of writing about them in order to make money. She gave chapter and verse as to George Everard Stokes, and, as a triumphant conclusion, placed the crumpled copy of the *Morning Star* in his hands, with the remark that

he might like to see a specimen of what she could do.

Victor read every word of the article attentively. That it had been written by some one on the spot there could be no sort of doubt, but not by Miranda. If it were true that she was a writer, surely her work would be as herself, not as this stupid nonsense. Yet, supposing her poor and dependent upon her pen, might she have yielded to temptation and listened to the gossip of servants, the confidences of Jules and Francine? The chilling doubt intruded, but he was far too loyal a gentleman to show it. He told Mrs. Sturge very decidedly that he could not believe Miss Ricordan authoress of this article unless he had it from her own lips, as it bore no traces of having been written by a lady of refinement and ability, but that he could not presume to question her.

Mrs. Sturge was much ruffled. "The facts speak for themselves," she said sourly. "Though why the English papers make such a fuss about Monsieur Préal I can't imagine. Thank goodness, we have dozens of far better novelists of our own, as you would see if you were able to read them. But you are welcome to keep the paper, and *I* think you ought to show it to your



great friend, who perhaps may not be taken in so easily, and should at least be put on his guard against such dangerous women."

With this last remark she hurried away, leaving Victor to con over each line of the article, and to dislike it more and more heartily.

Fate was unkind to Miranda, for Prével himself came to St. Enogat, almost for the first time, to obtain the manuscript of *La Rosée*, which he had given to Victor de Verton, in order to get it typed for the artist who was to illustrate it. They had not met since the picnic at Le Guildo, and when, looking from her window, Miranda saw the tall, soldierly figure in blue serge walking towards the hotel, she felt a happy surprise. She had promised to read to de Verton that morning, but this was not quite the reason prompting her to put on a dress fresh from the hands of the queen of *blanchisseuses de fin*, the little mother at Briac. She half unconsciously arranged her hair more carefully than usual, and yet lingered longer than was necessary to hang out her wet bathing dress and put little touches to the neat arrangement of the room.

Mrs. Sturge would have been well satisfied if she could have guessed with how perturbed

a mind she had left her victim. De Verton was still re-reading the article when a well-known voice interrupted him with inquiries why he had been so mundane as to drop his *St. Francis* and become so absorbed in a foreign newspaper. To de Verton, vexed and puzzled, there was only one course.

"It is a stupid article about you. Read it, and tell me what you think of it."

Préval ran his eyes over it and smiled. "It is, in effect, ridiculous. Written, no doubt, by some gossiping woman who lets her servants chatter to her. But it is these absurdities that debase literature. Against interviewers one can raise a firm protest; but even in England, where there is a society for everything, there is not one to protect the author from the paragraph hunter.

No woman ever blunders, as honest men constantly blunder, into an unnecessary telling of the whole truth. That de Verton should repeat Mrs. Sturge's story in the confident hope of Préval's immediately insisting Miranda could not write in such an odious manner merely showed a pathetic simplicity on his part. For Préval was not in the mood in which he had read *La Rosée* in the gold-green shadows of the

woods of Le Guildo. For some unexplained reason his work had been lately nearly at a standstill, and he was so accustomed to an entire mastery of his own talent that this irritating fact was beyond his comprehension.

His whole dislike of the writing woman came back in full force, with an undercurrent of vexation against this English girl he had almost tolerated. He drily gave it as his opinion that feminine journalists had no conscience, and that the owner of that terrible name, "Stokes," was possibly like all the rest. She evidently needed a few francs to buy chiffons, and invented this farrago with her *femme de chambre*.

De Verton knew that when his friend was out of temper there were apt to be other causes for it than those upon the surface. He gave back the manuscript with a sense that his morning had been spoilt, but not before Préval had torn up the *Morning Star* and thrown the scraps of paper behind the tamarisk bushes. His visit was brief.

"Dumont has rushed over to Dinard about these pictures," he explained, "and I have to meet him. Then, as a matter of business, I go, much against my will, to see this tennis. The scene of my book is laid here, and

this Anglomania for games is an essential feature."

"Then *au revoir*, Maurice. I go also this afternoon to watch Yvonne play to keep the championship of France. Wish her good luck."

When Miranda at last fulfilled her promise, she found Victor alone and depressed. She had not looked at her newspapers for days, and was all unaware of what the *Morning Star* was doing to ruin her holiday. Because she felt acutely disappointed to perceive that Maurice Prével was not there she did not even mention his name, and settled down to read some chapters of *The Newcomes* with a delight in them which almost made her listener forget Mrs. Sturge. He watched her as she read, looking so fresh from the clear sea, with her bright face lit with sympathetic intelligence. She had given him her friendship with such a generous hand. How could he risk its continuance by asking her for confidences she had not cared to make?

In his chivalry he hesitated too long, for the harsh clang of the lunch-bell stopped them, and Miranda was at once joined by Daisy Mostyn, charming in her French gown of faint grey, and obviously ready for Dinard in the afternoon. She looked delicately dainty and pretty, perhaps



all the more so as she had read the success of her new dress first in her looking-glass and then in Herapath's admiring eyes. The Marsetshire Daisy of dowdy blouses and unwaved hair would scarcely have known this modish little person, at whom the Frenchmen directed meaning glances.

"Yours has come, too," she announced as one bringing good tidings. "We must rush through lunch, so that you may have plenty of time to get ready before the carriage comes."

Miranda was always rapid. In half an hour there was nothing of the clematis-wreathed country maid of Le Guildo and its ivied ruins in this elegant wearer of her favourite shade of heliotrope, perfectly finished in every detail.

Francine was fascinated. "As I prophesied, Mademoiselle needed but a Dinard *couturière*. It all looks so simple, but what a *cachet*!" said the enraptured maid.

"You look more like the picture of Alice than ever to-day. I only see it when you have on your best things and that hat," commented Daisy, all unaware of the unwelcomeness of what she meant for a supreme compliment.

Mrs. Medlicott and Mrs. Sturge surveyed them with candidly spoken disapproval as they

drove away. "Such an affectation of Frenchness. So different from darling Kitty's nice girlish piqué," decided Mrs. Sturge, as that unfortunate personage appeared, hopelessly plain and hot, in the trying raiment exaggerating the already quite sufficient number of her years.

The tennis-courts were crowded with eager spectators, the French majority watching the various matches with as much interest as if they were so many Waterloos. In France tennis tournaments still have something of the charm of novelty, and English players, who come over condescendingly to show the foreigners what tennis really means, find themselves surprised into doing their utmost if they wish to avoid being beaten.

"Tou-Tou" Deruche in particular was exasperating to the wholesome athletic visitors, whose fitness suggested so much plain living and cold bathing. He had led a wild cotillon with Dot Scott-Battersby at two in the morning, and breakfasted on a *petit verre* of absinthe ; yet here he was, playing the final in the men's singles with such brilliancy that the cheering was almost incessant. His opponent just managed to win by mere steadiness, but "Tou-Tou" marched out with all the honours of war, and the feminine applause was at any rate enthusiastic.

In the mixed doubles he and Yvonne de la Rivière had been victorious in the morning ; but the great excitement of the finals for the Ladies' Cup was yet to come. Miranda and Daisy sat with Madame de Verton and Yvonne herself to watch "Tou-Tou" and the famous Dr. Bevan. Miranda, forgetful of her disappointment, looked on with genuine amusement, and answered the countless questions of Paulette and Fi-Fi, seated behind them, looking as if they had just stepped out of a fashion plate.

They were on the pleasant shady side ; but, perhaps because just opposite them Dot Scott-Battersby's serpent-green sequins glittered in the blazing sun, Mark Herapath devoted himself to Daisy more conspicuously than he had ever done before. And Daisy listened ; and if she did not encourage, yet she did not resolutely check the daring glances and low-spoken words. She was foolish, but at her age, in the first consciousness of a new power, it was not, after all, very wonderful. And for once Miranda was off her guard, and had taken the place between Madame de Verton and the elated yet nervous Yvonne.

For she had been as startled as Yvonne herself to see Maurice Préval at a little distance watching the game intently, yet with an air of

complete indifference as to its result. Himself a noted fencer, he admired the quickness of eye of the lean, ugly "Tou-Tou," in his preposterous sash ; but the sight of Miranda, with this new air of fashion, rather inconsistently convinced him that she was indeed the writer of the detestable article in the *Morning Star*. Ordinarily he would have dismissed mere newspaper cackle in silence or with a contemptuous word. But once again he knew now that he had almost been betrayed into trusting a woman. Miranda, in her dryad-wreath, listening to *La Rosée*, playing with the children, and passing as of right into fairyland secure of welcome, had seemed a being all compact of honesty and truth. Again, her friendship for Victor had seemed to show her so full of penetration and of beautiful compassion. Over yonder, in her coquettish dress, sat George Stokes—the horrible name !—who had scribbled all unscrupulously of his private life, and shown him in that distorted false light.

When he was discovered by Madame de Verton, and compelled by Paulette to sit between herself and Fi-Fi, he merely spoke the two or three inevitable words demanded by bare courtesy to Miranda. She felt the changed tone sharply, though her ready pride flew to the rescue, and



kept her talking and laughing lightly. The genius, then, was but a thing of capricious moods and humours, with a dangerous power to seem quite otherwise.

Her heart went out in what she only thought was pity for Yvonne de la Rivière. "How men can hurt us," she thought, "and how women have to bear it!" The remembrance of those stormy tears, that wild confession in the dawn, blotted out the gay surrounding scene, the pretty faces set in a frame of delightful colour. She had indeed been fortunate only to have known of love by hearsay, not to have to endure that secret pain which would surely make Yvonne's dexterous hand uncertain. But she did not understand the character of the girl whose ancestors had been knight combatants five hundred years ago. Their nobility obliged this slight descendant to take her place upon the sanded courts with very much the same resolution with which they themselves might have ridden into the lists for the "gentle and joyous sport" of killing each other.

The English opponent was a neat, well-grown girl, with a look of endurance and capacity. She had not played before that day, and at first it looked as if hers was to be an easy victory.

"Tou-Tou" Deruche, who had been a violent Anglophobe until that attitude went out of fashion, felt his ancient disgust of *perfidie* Albion reviving in full force. But presently Yvonne made a stroke so brilliant and so unexpected that all the onlookers applauded loudly, and she saw Maurice Prével clap his hands with the rest. It affected her like some potent stimulant, and she forgot fatigue, and played in her last tournament as she had never played before.

Her English antagonist, with all her strength, was not quite a match for this extraordinary skill in placing the ball. The spectators watched fascinated ; and when a perfect shout proclaimed that France had kept the cup, Prével was one of the first to hurry forward to congratulate the winner. The *svelte* grace of the beautiful figure had appealed to him as an artist, and Yvonne's triumph was the sweetest moment of her life.

Even Madame de Verton forgot prejudice in pride, and Paulette and Fi-Fi shrilly announced that they too meant to go in for "*le sport*" and to be champions at an early date. Monsieur de Castel was not present to remind his bride that all these pleasures were at an end, and she could rejoice to the utmost in being the heroine of the moment, and at the fact that the English cheered

her heartily when, at the prize-giving, she took the splendid cup which was now her own. Victor de Verton was, after all, too unwell to be present, and was lying quietly in his darkened room.

"Tou-Tou" Deruche, quite comforted for his own defeat, announced that he had ordered tea for the winners in a private room at the Grand Hotel, and Madame de Verton could not refuse Yvonne's wish to accept his urgent hospitality. Scattering invitations right and left, he soon gathered twenty or thirty guests in the pretty salon, decked with flowers, with a magnificent bouquet for the champion in the centre of the table. Préval had refused until Yvonne added her entreaties that he would take one little cup of tea with them. She forgot reserve in her excitement, and as he walked beside her to the hotel, little guessing what a part he had played in the drama of her life, she found a reckless happiness in his presence.

Miranda did not speak to him, but gave a hand to each of the children, and a patient hearing to all they had to say. Had she offended him? she asked herself wonderingly, until presently Herapath, of all unlikely people, gave the answer to the unspoken question.

"There's an awfully amusing article all about Préval in the *Morning Star*, Miss Ricordan. You ought to read it. It makes him out more of a fool than he looks. He's set up like a soldier, and doesn't look literary at all."

Her quickness of perception made her go straight to the right conclusion of the whole matter. She knew now. Some one had told him she was George Stokes. He hated writing women. He had read the article, been displeased at it, and ascribed it to her. She longed to be alone in her room, to tear open the paper and to know what it contained. The cruel injustice of it all stung her. The poor little talent that had helped to win her independence looked so contemptible. He could believe that she wrote vulgar personalities, whilst *she* was confronted with *La Rosée*. Her love of literature surged up in revolt against this mean aspect of its meanest side. The degradation of journalism in all this personality revolted her. She had at least kept her pen clean and honest in the humble hope that some day she might have leisure and just means enough to do the best in her power.

There was a piano in the room, and when some lively choruses had ended, and "Tou-Tou" begged her to sing something, it was



almost a relief. Yvonne de la Rivière had accompanied her more than once, and now offered her services.

"Will you sing for me the 'Chanson de l'Adieu' of Tosti?" she begged; and as she softly played the opening bars, she whispered to Miranda, "I am not jealous to-day of your voice, because it will express for me my own sentiments."

Miranda flung all her pain into the music, and it only made the full notes richer and sweeter:—

"Partir c'est mourir un peu,  
C'est mourir à ce qu'on aime,  
On laisse un peu de soi-même.

\* \* \*

"C'est toujours le deuil d'un vœu,  
Le dernier vers d'un poème.  
Partir c'est mourir un peu. . . ."

Préval listened, and thought how utterly artificial an art music could be, and how like was the singer to the picture of Alice. Yvonne de la Rivière heard it as the end of the story of her own heart, and, French to the core, enjoyed what she thought the melancholy grace of its romance. The sentimental in Herapath was agreeably stirred as he watched Daisy, seated silent beside the window.

But to Miranda herself, on the light wings of the farewell came the fear, growing to a burning certainty, that because this one man misjudged her, she had said good-bye to peace of mind, and found sorrow waiting for her on the bright coast of emerald.

Once back at the villa, she tore open the *Morning Star*, to find the article worse than her worst imaginings. That Fraser Micklethwaite could have allowed it to appear at all filled her with indignation. That it might possibly have been done in his absence never even occurred to her, for we are all apt to be thoroughly unjust when we are ourselves misjudged. Foderby had written it, she was quite sure, and equally sure that either to him or to Mrs. Sturge she owed the disclosure of her pseudonym. She could go to Mrs. Sturge and tell her she had nothing to do with this insult to Maurice Préval, but what would that avail to help her? Mrs. Sturge did not know him, and, if she did, would not understand the strength of her feeling in the matter. She was far too vulgar to recognize vulgarity.

Miranda's was a self-contained nature, and she decided to follow the advice, seeming so easy when she had given it to Daisy Mostyn, to

make no confidences at all, lest she should afterwards regret them. For the first time she looked forward to going back to England, as if by so doing she would leave all these troubles behind her. For the first time she looked back to the Chelsea flat, to feel she had been very content there. Just for a moment all her courage forsook her, and Miranda Ricordan let a few womanly tears twinkle on the smudgy columns of the *Morning Star*, where George Stokes had been but yesterday so glad to shine.

No remembrance of Fraser Micklethwaite came to her, no thought of accepting the man who loved her as a refuge from this other who so cruelly misunderstood. With misty eyes she seemed to see the castle at Le Gualdo, to hear the voice of the magician who could wave his Prospero's wand, and, lo ! a host of fairies ready to do his bidding, and never a one of them all to tell him that to this English girl her literary honour was her dearest possession.

## CHAPTER XII

### MAUVE DOMINOES

UPON the morning before the masked ball, Victor de Verton's chair was not in its usual place in the garden, and the rumour that a doctor had been with him in the night was confirmed by Paulette, who was sent over from Dinard with her nurse to inquire for him.

"He suffers too much even to embrace me," the child had said very sadly to Miranda. "The good St. Michel did not, after all, listen to our prayers that day, and I do not comprehend a saint who accepts a heart of true gold and does nothing for it"—a theological difficulty with which Miranda felt little inclination to cope.

She grieved that, just as she had at last decided to speak to Victor about the article, this illness should intervene; for the longing that Préval should know the truth overmastered her



favourite policy of silence as to her own affairs. Supposing this were indeed the end, that their acquaintance were to break off abruptly without a word of explanation. . . . Such things happened every day.

“Each life’s unfulfilled, you see ;  
It hangs still patchy and scrappy.”

These words were echoing unsatisfactorily in her ears as Daisy came to her with a bright look of pleasure in her face.

“Oh, Miranda, I am so glad you made me have that photograph taken as Titania,” she explained. “Archie is so pleased with it. He’s written me such a letter—like the letters he used to write when we were engaged. He says that he wants awfully to see me, and that if he could give up the last matches—which, of course, is impossible—he’d come over and fetch me. He says he’s got a silver frame for it, and shows it to every one. And, you know, I’d almost begun to believe he was tired of me because of the endless bother with the cooks. I meant to have said *dreadful* things to you that day in London, only you wouldn’t listen.”

“Because I knew what a mistake it all was,” said Miranda. “Your Archie is a dear good fellow, if he hasn’t the facility in some men for

saying things they don't mean and looking things they daren't say."

Daisy blushed. "I'm afraid I have been a little silly, Miranda," she confessed unwillingly.

"And I am quite sure of it," replied her friend without acidity. "Before this masking begins, I want to tell you that Mrs. Sturge has been talking about you, and that Archie is worth a dozen Major Herapaths. If I had not trusted you entirely, I might have spoken before. But the time has come now for you to show him to-night, if he finds you out, that you are a wife and a mother, not a pretty doll for him to play with till he tires of it or—it breaks."

Daisy sighed. "He *will* find me out, because I stupidly told him I was going in a mauve domino in the hope of being mistaken for you. And I said he could have four dances. He is going to be in grey, with a silver star on the right shoulder. I suppose really the only thing is not to go to the Casino at all."

There was such a depth of despair in this heroic decision that Miranda softened. She wanted something to distract her thoughts, and an idea occurred to her. "We will walk into Dinard at once, and see if by any chance they have two dominoes exactly alike at the place

where we are going to hire them. Then there will be an admirable chance of a comedy of errors."

"We were to have met under the big palm tree in the corridor," admitted Daisy reluctantly. "But, somehow, ever since Archie's letter came I *have* so wished I had never told Major Herapath what colour I was going to wear."

"Then, if you have learnt your lesson, there is no need for a sermon from me. Only, Daisy, be very thankful. It is so easy to resist temptation until it comes, and then the very best of us never quite know what may chance."

The weather was dull and chilly, with spurts of rain; the rough sea looked cold and wild, and Miranda felt that she would like to have stood alone on the shore at St. Briac to watch the waves curling in foam-fountains over the dark rocks. All Dinard had deserted the wind-swept beach, to loiter in the sheltered narrow streets, and bargain at the pretty, extortionate little shops.

The milliners had imported plenty of tempting dominoes from Paris, and the obliging lady from whom they were to be hired entered delightedly into their plot. "But, if Mesdames desire to deceive absolutely, they must pay

attention to everything. The shoes, for instance, should be similar. All these Messieurs have the eye of the lynx for the little foot. And, again, dare I observe that the one wears the wedding ring, the other not? There may be some ruse in the cotillon for removing the gloves. That is an immense secret, but the valet of Monsieur Deruche has whispered it. Also observe well these hoods, lined with ravishing violets. That is to conceal the hair totally, and by making one higher than the other, the height will seem the same. For the price, it is naturally a franc or two more, but for the pleasure one has to pay."

Having agreed to do so, they began their homeward walk.

"Luckily, we can wear each other's shoes, so a question of exchange will settle that, if it really matters," concluded Miranda.

"We must. He said my feet looked so nice in mine," declared Daisy shamefacedly.

"You little goose to be pleased," laughed Miranda, whose spirits were rising. "But about the ring?"

"Oh, I couldn't take mine off. I never have. I—I shouldn't feel safe without it."

Miranda was relieved by her urgency. "Fortu-



nately this is a place where we can easily supply the deficiency."

They entered the glittering shop labelled conspicuously "Imitation," and here, too, there were interest and enjoyment on the part of the stout, bald salesman. "A device for the *bal masqué*? Perfectly. But Mademoiselle is cruel to put an ornament on the hand that may deprive so many of hopes." Miranda slipped on the tawdry false ring with a curious sensation, but she had been often enough a success in amateur theatricals to feel that she might possibly play this difficult new part.

She had once horrified Mrs. Sturge by promising to speak to Major Herapath herself, and to-night she would keep her word, unless the fates were very unpropitious. At least there was no chance of any further meeting with Préval at the Casino. He would be writing splendid things in his solitary room, with the sound of the waves beating upon the beach, while she was only wasting her time over these petty tangles. The old day-dream—faithful companion of so many years—had deserted her now. She no longer let her mind rest upon that wonderful book to be written by her hand in a rose-coloured future. It dwelt obstinately upon

the present, until she felt as if George Everard Stokes were her enemy instead of her other self.

Mrs. Scott-Battersby had met them as they came from the modiste, and as soon as they were out of sight she had hastened into the shop. It was here that one of her largest bills had been paid by Herapath, and she was received with befitting welcome as an important customer. In her bad, over-fluent French, with its atrocious accent, she explained that, as she and Mrs. Mostyn were about the same height, they wished to dress alike at the ball, in order to have some fun out of the confusion, and that price was no object if Madame would arrange the matter cleverly. Madame, who loved mischief nearly as well as money-making, saw no reason either for betraying confidences or refusing a good offer.

Thus it befell that, when Daisy and Miranda were dressing, with even the aggrieved Francine excluded from the room, Mrs. Scott-Battersby was tucking her carefully dyed curls away under the violet wreath inside her mauve hood, and adjusting a lace-edged mask of exactly the same pattern. How she should enjoy making Mark Herapath ridiculous in his own eyes! She knew

him far too intimately not to be sure that he would have found out Daisy's colour and arranged to meet her, just as he had done in old days in India.

It was when Francine failed to recognize them that Miranda felt that they had succeeded, and that she had taught Daisy fairly successfully to disguise her voice to the correct *bal masqué* squeak. "But you cannot impose upon your old Francine. She knows far too well her beloved mistress," that worthy had said, seizing Daisy's gloved hand and kissing it respectfully.

Nor was Madame de Verton any happier in her confident guesses. A few of the most distinguished ladies in Dinard had helped the bachelors to arrange their ball, and were to attend it unmasked. Although Yvonne was not to be present, the gay Madame de Verton was as ready for any amusement as a débutante.

"A fiancée is best not seen too much in the world before the marriage, but I am so old it does me good to be assured that youth is not extinct; and as for our poor Victor, he is better, and prays me earnestly to divert myself a little."

Arrived at the Casino, glittering with a prodigal display of extra lights, Miranda came to the

conclusion that a masked ball was rather bizarre than actually pretty. The hidden faces, the gay loose folds of the all-concealing dominoes, had a levelling effect almost monotonous. Beauty was at a momentary discount, and success lay with the witty or the impudent. They did not discover the third mauve domino, keeping so adroitly in the background, and were whirled away almost directly into the crowd of dancers. What Daisy had expected she scarcely knew, but certainly something less like a bewildering dream.

There is a spurious promise of the unusual about a *bal masqué* very far from the commonplace realization. Perhaps if the masks were held, as Romeo and Juliet hold theirs, it might be better ; but, as it is, the chief feeling of the ordinary woman is a deadly fear of compromising herself with the wrong man. The vaguely expected adventures look delightful in anticipation, but dangerous close at hand. French folks are happy enough, but the English temperament, though to-day it struggles hard to seem otherwise, is at bottom thoroughly against *sans-gêne*. Daisy really felt like a timid child in a dark room, as she failed to identify even "Tou-Tou" Deruche's familiar mannerisms. The old sensa-



tion of being out of it pressed painfully upon her for the first time since she had come to Dinard.

When Herapath saw them come in, he was only amused at the trick they were evidently trying to play upon him, and quite undisturbed in his assurance of recognizing Daisy by her eyes. Nor did he doubt that she would be in due time at the rendezvous under the big palm tree. Then he would take her out on the terrace ; for the wind had abated, and a pallid moon was making fitful appearances through veils of gauzy cloud.

He was in a mood of elation and excitement. The news had come that the Indian appointment he coveted was his at last, just when his luck at baccarat had so unexpectedly freed him from debt. He would have to leave almost immediately, but he resolved that he would not go until after a good-bye Daisy should always remember, even if he himself forgot it. She was a sweet little girl, and he would especially like an assurance from her that he was not too old to win hearts. He could face death—had faced it dauntlessly—but the thought of old age, with its cruel limitations, touched him with a cold fear. But not to-night, his vanity now

insistently proclaimed him dangerous to her peace, and he listened, rejoicing, to its soothing counsels.

The Hungarians were playing the "Blue Danube" with such magic as to embroider every bar with meaning. Miranda regretted that she was not forgetting all her troubles in sheer joy of dancing to the one waltz having immortal youth in its rhythm. She had seated herself under the palm tree to await the task which was not wholly easy, and had no idea that Dot Scott-Battersby, convinced that she was Daisy, awaiting Herapath, had slipped behind a convenient curtain. She had no delicate scruples as to playing eavesdropper; only an overwhelming desire to see the girl humiliate herself, as she had done, by weak yielding to this man.

The retrospect of her own past set itself mockingly to this familiar dance, rousing a stinging sense of self-contempt. It comforted her to reflect that Daisy, with her youth and lovely freshness, was hurrying down the track she had herself trodden with such a reckless carelessness as to its ending. Yet she hated her certainty that once again Herapath would have his way,

whilst all her own power to charm had vanished on the swift feet of the fleeting years.

When he came, she knew him at once, for he took no pains to disguise his voice. The hall was deserted now, and quiet but for the swaying music.

"Are you sure who I am?" said Miranda, imitating Daisy better than she knew.

"One glance at your eyes was enough," whispered Herapath. "Do you think any one who has ever looked into them could be mistaken? It was like you to give me these dances, to make me so happy, even though it is for the last time. The news came to-day. I shall have to leave directly to take up my Indian appointment. I suppose I shall never see you again, and before we part I want to tell you what you know already."

He had decided that, after all, the hall was best. There might be other couples on the dark terrace, and the sound of the band would drown their low tones. The unseen Dot Scott-Battersby listened with a scornful smile, as once again, without pausing for any reply, he told the old, old story with an eloquence he had not had when it was new to her.

Miranda was silent, only drawing away the

hand he was trying to take, upon which the wedding ring shone solitary.

Herapath, judging by previous experience, fancied the glove had been removed for the very purpose, and continued more ardently, "Mrs. Mostyn—Daisy, let me at least tell you that I love you. If you tell me that you care for me ever so little, it will be the one sweet remembrance I shall take into my exile."

He had not been as romantic as this with her, thought Dot Scott-Battersby.

Miranda did not want to be melodramatic, but she was so angry that she acted as a Frenchwoman would certainly have done when she put her hand up to her mask and let it fall into her lap without a word. Herapath, with all his assurance, was thoroughly taken aback, and paled a little under her indignant glance.

"You see, you were mistaken, after all, Major Herapath," she said sternly. "Mrs. Mostyn asked me to take her place here to-night, because she did not wish to come, and because she even regretted having told you the colour of her domino. How can you, a soldier and a gentleman, turn your hand to such dishonest mischief-making? My friend loves her husband and her children. But if she did not, and were mad



enough to care for you, what would you do with her? Love her with what you profane by that name for a few months, and then go your way as you have gone before."

"Upon my word," said Herapath, inconsistently admiring Miranda for the first time, "your eyes are as beautiful as hers, after all!"

The unseen, intent listener considered this a master-stroke, for neither she nor Herapath gauged Miranda at all. The good women they knew were apt to be dull or plain, and she, in her fearless indignation, had never looked so well before.

"I think you forget to whom you are talking. You need not trouble to repeat any of these well-worn platitudes of yours. Try to believe me when I tell you that I despise you, and that I know you are nothing to Daisy Mostyn."

Herapath was positively so interested in the situation that he scarcely realized his own hopelessly undignified appearance. "If I really am what you think me, at least I take my punishment patiently," he murmured, still sanguine of conciliation.

"But that is only because you are so conceited, and because you would positively rather be abused than ignored," said Miranda scornfully.

"We live in different worlds, and I am thankful to think that I have never known yours, and that, if Daisy lost herself there for an idle moment, she came back before it was too late. Unless you promise to let her alone to-night I will tell her all that has happened. No doubt she will be interested to know that there are other eyes as blue as hers."

Miranda gave him time to answer as she replaced her mask. There was a cold irony in her voice which robbed her words of any possible touch of coquetry. Herapath had no alternative but to mutter an apology, and before it was half ended the music stopped and a stream of dancers filled the corridor.

Miranda hurried away at the invitation of a brown domino of an eccentricity suggesting "Tou-Tou" Deruche, and Dot Scott-Battersby passed unobserved from behind her curtain and tapped Herapath's arm with her fan.

"I am late, and I am sorry," she squeaked in a high, false tone. "Take me to the terrace before I am suffocated."

In the cool darkness his self-respect returned, and he began to pay a few guarded compliments; for this time it must be Daisy. The moon had vanished, and he could scarcely see his com-

panion at all. She persisted in maintaining her assumed voice, but gave him every possible encouragement to break his promise. He now kissed a willing hand and grew more reckless, keeping the letter of his bond, but not the spirit, until the mauve domino lamented his departure and hinted sweetly of her unhappiness, when he flung caution to the winds and made a more than ever fervent profession of undying affection.

To his consternation a well-known laugh grated harshly upon his ear. "What a fool you are, Mark! Come a little nearer, and you'll find your old friend Dot. I stood behind a curtain in the hall and heard Miranda Ricordan give you a good drubbin', and enjoyed it. You won't enjoy bein' here with me much, and need not exert yourself to lie about my eyes. Shabby conduct on my part, after your payin' all those bills; but I didn't feel they quite cancelled your debt. I saw that child blushin' over a letter from her husband to-day. You've had no effect on her, with all your fascinations. Perhaps you are gettin' past it, after all. It will be funny to think of you back in India takin' a back seat, quite played out, and watchin' the boys do as you did."

"Upon my word, Dot, you've played a thoroughly mean trick on me," began Herapath, beaten at all points, and feeling a wholesome shame for possibly the first time in his life as she continued :—

"Till to-day I was ready enough to see Daisy Mostyn behave like the rest of us ; but, for all that, when I put on this domino I meant to slip in to the place where you were waitin' for her. Miranda Ricordan got there first, and I'm glad of it. She's a good sort. She was in dead earnest, and she made me think of the two babies belonging to her silly Daisy. Now you've got to promise *me* to let Daisy Mostyn alone, and I think you won't break your parole. Ta-ta ! Next time don't go in for any one who has a friend as clever as Miranda. She's very much more than a match for you. And even I have not come off quite second-best."

When Herapath went back to the ball-room, smarting with irritation, he found no temptation to remain in it, though the fun was fast and furious, and a cotillon of mysteries was at its height.

Daisy, hampered by her broken French, and in fear of being discovered by Herapath, had



soon tired of the noisy crowd. To the surprise of Madame de Verton, she and Miranda had pleaded fatigue and gone home together before the general unmasking so invariably full of disagreeable surprises. But not before Miranda had had a brief, amazing interview with Dot Scott-Battersby, inspiring her with fresh contempt for Herapath, and entitling her to tell Daisy the whole story when they were once more in their quiet rooms.

"The poor thing had a little baby once, and it died. It made her think of yours, I fancy, and feel how sad it would be for them if you forgot them even for a moment." Miranda spoke with a serious sweetness new to her.

"Oh, Miranda, I have been foolish," said Daisy remorsefully, "but I never, never thought of any end like this. All my life I shall remember what you have done for me, and some day I shall tell Archie. I should have been so utterly ashamed if I had heard any one dare to speak to me like that. It was so nice at first to be admired, but afterwards I was a little frightened; and then, again, that seemed senseless. I think I've had nearly fun enough, and that I shall soon want to go home and feel the arms of my babies clinging to me again.

You've been a friend of a thousand to-night. How could you dare to speak as you did? I believe you are never afraid to do what is right, and yet you have never been hard to me or scolded me as I deserve."

But not to repentant Daisy, kissing her so tenderly, could she speak of her own unhappiness. Alone at last, by the open window in her own room, she could bend her head and shed the silent tears bringing no relief, whilst the sea sobbed out a requiem for the dying summer. She saw the light where Victor de Verton lay suffering, and thought how gladly she would have watched with him. He alone understood her. She was so glad to have helped Daisy; but who would help her? The thought of her return to England was dreadful to her now, and she could admit at last that it was because France was the country of Maurice Préval. Keeping her sad vigil, she knew that her bright sense of freedom had vanished into the past.

If love comes first when we are old enough to count the cost, it is not all gladness, for it is so often linked with a humility making its return seem impossible. Miranda felt caught in chains almost against her will. She had come to these green cliffs to forget George Stokes,

and the wish could never be granted now. How little a thing her patient work appeared beside that memory of the happy Miranda in the fairyland of Le Guildo, perfumed with traveller's joy! In the far future the remembrance would shine like a star, and when the world gave Préval new laurels, she too would crown him in her heart.

## CHAPTER XIII

### PAULETTE

**H**ERAPATH left St. Enogat upon the day following the masked ball. His vanity had received a salutary if sharply unpleasant check, and that he was now endeavouring to concentrate his mind upon his new appointment would have convinced Miranda, could she have known it, that she had spoken to some purpose, after all.

His actual farewell to Daisy bore an almost ludicrous contrast to that of his last night's elated imagination. He felt old and stupidly unable to say the right thing when she shook hands with him in the hall before a crowd of curious idlers. He was sure she knew all that had happened ; irritatingly certain that he had not even power enough over her to pick up the threads of their interrupted flirtation by so much as a tender glance. Nothing could have been tamer or more inconclusive. This little country girl—scarcely as pretty as he had fancied



—had been clever enough to use her clever friend to place him at an utter disadvantage ; and he had no saving sense of humour to help him to laugh at himself.

As he drove away in a dreary drizzling rain, Dot Scott-Battersby waved her hand smilingly from her villa window, and he felt that even she did not desire to keep him beside her. The handsome, irresistible wounded hero from the war seemed to have suddenly degenerated into an unsuccessful middle-aged failure, for women had always occupied so prominent a place in his life the stage looked dismally empty without a leading lady.

If Daisy had slightly overacted her indifference, her relief was as genuine as her hope she might never meet this man again. She had indeed learnt the lesson gently taught by Miranda's kindly tact. To be left in the background might not be exciting, but it was safe, and the faithful love of her husband and babies looked sweeter now than the friendship she had thought so alluring until she understood the price she had been expected to pay for it.

The unnecessary shouts of the driver of the ramshackle one-horse cab were still audible when Paulette and Fi-Fi arrived, charming in Gordon

kilts and saucy black turbans with scarlet feathers. Fi-Fi's mother, Madame Mélancourt, was a relation of the de Vertons, and sent the children over nearly every day to inquire after the invalid.

"Our dear Monsieur Victor is better," announced Paulette joyfully, kissing Miranda on both cheeks. "St. Michel is not false, after all. They say that is always the case with the handsome ones, and I began to wish I had offered my heart to a holy bleeding martyr instead of a saint with curls and such fine armour. Monsieur Victor prays you to visit him later, in his little salon, where it is very gay with a fire and all the flowers we brought him. He is in his chair again, and often laughing, though so very pale. But Fi-Fi and I came also to make a petition of you, Mademoiselle. We are both rich enormously, for we have saved our francs well, and we wish to go to St. Malo, where it is cheap to buy presents for those who are in Paris. It is so stupid to go with Claire, who fears mortally the crossing; but if you and Madame would graciously conduct us, we could purchase our souvenirs at our ease, and bargain for them, as one must, for Francine recounts that they are

all thieves, and she is herself Bretonne, so that she must be right."

It was therefore agreed that they should start early in the afternoon, unless the weather proved too wet.

"A little rain signifies nothing," insisted Paulette. "You wear the costumes of the tailor, in which the Anglaises look adorable. As for us, we are Scotch, and altogether in the autumn modes. It is well it is not too hot to exhibit them. One wearies of the *fin-de-saison* air of the muslin skirts upon the Plage. La-la! it will soon be time to return to the boulevards, and I, for one, shall not weep. I am Parisienne, and even here we others feel too much *en province*. Yet it makes me sorrowful to think of my good friends perishing in their black London."

When Miranda at last saw Victor in the cheerful room, scented with roses and pine logs, Madame de Verton sat beside him, doing some dainty embroidery not whiter than her small, plump hands, suggesting the respectful kisses of generations of admirers. She was shocked at the startling change wrought by a few days' illness, and saw that no explanations would be possible to-day. They had been so intimate,

side by side alone in the garden, but this meeting within doors placed them upon a new and unfamiliar footing.

There was no time for reading now. That perhaps the beautiful intercourse of the sunshiny holiday leisure was not to come again, was a thought bringing with it a poignant sense of pain. Only books of devotion lay upon the chair. But no; she was glad to see that with them were the little Browning and the shabby volume of *Pervenches*, although he did not speak of Maurice. If they had been alone, the essential word would quickly have been said, thought Miranda, as she looked at his worn forehead, above eyes pathetic with suffering, yet full of the old courage and resignation.

If Victor could have realized how entirely, from the very first, she had forgotten his deformity, it would have made him happy. As it was, the clear certainty that the end of the struggle was nearing, sustained him to endure. In exalted moments of childlike faith, the blush of dawn, the rose of sunset brought to him, as to a great English painter, unspeakable visions of angels. Radiant saints, in the lovely guise in which the old masters saw them, held out their helpful hands. The solemn organ music



of St. Cecily, flower-crowned, rolled in deep, glorious harmonies through his dreams.

There is nothing sadder in life than the way it keeps us lonely. Heart to heart sometimes ; soul to soul almost never. Miranda and Victor de Verton, penetrated with comprehending sympathy for each other, had to talk of the weather and the ball because a cheerful old lady enjoyed the comfort of warming her embroidered slippers at the little sputtering fire.

Upon hearing of the expedition to St. Malo, Victor asked, "Will you purchase those dear children some pretty present for me, Mademoiselle, if it is not too troublesome to you? See how they have bought roses with their own sous, and left their play to come and ask for me."

Miranda gladly promised ; and as the rain held off in a grudging, gusty manner, they duly embarked on the fussy little boat with the old exaggerated bustle of departure. St. Malo was not disposed quite to fulfil its prodigal promises of that first July morning. The streets were something dirty, and inclined to exhibit forlorn scraps of paper fluttering about them with their own special air of shabbiness. The grey bastions loomed sombre against a grey sky, lacking the

brilliant contrast of the bright hour of their coming. Chateaubriand's tomb looked melancholy upon its little solitary, sea-swept island, and Miranda wondered why he had chosen to rest there, with the screaming gulls for his harsh-voiced mourners.

Daisy, whose French had at least improved in quantity, if not in quality, enjoyed wandering from shop to shop with the children, slow to make up their minds, and energetic in inquiries as to the *dernier prix* for all things well beyond their means. Miranda, who was utterly lacking in the feminine instinct for bargaining, grew very tired of it all. She was not outwardly impatient, but, with Victor de Verton dying, and Maurice Préal misjudging her, she could not comprehend Daisy's delight in the cheapness of her favourite chiffon veils. Paulette and Fi-Fi watched her try them on with precocious but unfeigned interest, and proffered advice quite worth taking as to the becomingness of various shades to her complexion.

Meanwhile, Miranda left them, to look at the church, and to find its tall, pale Christ, in ivory, seeming to watch pityingly a crowd of kneeling women in deep mourning, whilst the dim aisles resounded with some wailing litany for the soul

of one departed. Everything corresponded with her own melancholy mood. She looked back to her first sight of St. Malo as to a distant event. All her life seemed concentrated in these few vanished golden weeks.

But hers was a resolute nature, and with a sigh she retraced her steps to meet the excited children, eager to show their purchases. To take them to a delightful little confectioner's shop, full of the insinuating odours of hot pastry and gaudy with satin *bonbonnières*, was to become more cheerful. She was not selfish, and she found unexpected comfort in giving the bankrupt Fi-Fi and Paulette cups of chocolate with frothy summits of whipped cream, for which their gratitude was amusingly profuse and highly elegant in expression. To the English child, thanks are ever a difficulty. The heart may be grateful, but the tongue is tied, and the giver left doubtful.

"Fear not to offer us more *éclairs*," remarked Paulette. "Praise be to Heaven, we have the digestions truly superb."

"And here are cakes worthy of such pretty mouths, my angels," interposed the stout, admiring proprietress, watching the crisp delicacies vanish with visible satisfaction, whilst she re-

volved the possibilities of such captivating skirts for her own twins.

Daisy herself exhibited so good an appetite that Miranda smiled. Herapath was apparently forgotten already, and with him her little attempts to seem older, and more familiar with the ways of his world. The pose of *femme incomprise* did not do at two-and-twenty. Ten years later, perhaps, but not at an age when there is consolation to be found in cream fondants.

They had been a long time over their shopping, and were now heavily laden with fragile packages of pottery, daintily and insecurely tied up with pink and blue ribbons. It was much later than they had intended when at last they left the *confiserie*, to find that St. Malo had in half an hour undergone a complete metamorphosis. A loud brass band now clanged out popular music in the thronged Place Chateaubriand. Crowds of dusty, red-breeched soldiers, home from their military service, were being greeted as warriors from a victorious campaign, especially by their feminine friends, smartly dressed to do them honour. There was such an all-pervading smell of cookery, with predominant onions, as to underline the fact that domestic affection assumes a savoury and sub-



stantial aspect in France. Every café and wine shop was doing good business, accounting for the rather boisterous spirits of many of these brave defenders of their country.

There was scarcely standing-room at the animated landing-place, enlivened by several vocalists, conspicuous for high-pitched confidence rather than capacity. It was not exactly an agreeable position, and Daisy, in particular, was bombarded with plain-spoken compliments and displeasingly bold glances. When the boat came in it was at once filled to overflowing, and they prepared, unwillingly enough, to resign themselves to another disagreeable ten minutes, with a similar possibility of disappointment.

The steamers were so small, and the passengers so numerous, that Miranda was thankful when an old fisherman offered them his sailing boat at a somewhat extortionate price. As a rule, at St. Malo these boats abound, and the traveller is pestered by a swarm of sailors; but to-night the sudden demand had for once equalled the supply, and *L'Hirondelle*, a trifle the worse for wear, was the only visible means of getting them home in time for dinner. "Ask these brave *militaires* if the old Pierre is not worthy of the confidence of Mesdames," the rather

alarmingly talkative mariner had concluded. But Mesdames were not disposed to give conversational openings, even to a pair of good-looking, self-conscious young officers, admiring themselves and their immaculate boots with a satisfaction by no means undeserved by either.

The excited children jumped delightedly on board, rejoicing at such an adventure. "We are like the princesses in the fairy tales," announced Paulette complacently, "for they always had ships with sails. And as we have plenty of chocolate we might go very, very far, as they did—even to England or to some beautiful unknown country."

It was much rougher than it had seemed from the land, and a veering wind compelled Pierre to tack constantly instead of making the green coast so exasperatingly close at hand. Daisy, who was a bad sailor and very timid, was privately rather frightened, but Miranda enjoyed the salt freshness of the air, cold in the gathering twilight.

She had impressed upon the children that they were to keep very still, and for a time they were obedient. Then Paulette contrived to drop the parcel she was examining as she leant over the edge at the end of the seat. The next

moment there was a sudden gust of wind, followed by a wild shriek from Fi-Fi. Old Pierre, stupid with overmuch cider, and busy with his sail, did not realize what had happened until he saw Miranda fling herself into the sea and dive after a disappearing plaid petticoat.

Daisy, white with terror, watched as she held the frantic Fi-Fi firmly by the hand. She felt herself humbled by her own sense of powerlessness, and almost awed at Miranda's quick courage. The few seconds seemed a dreadful eternity, and then the swimmer reappeared at some distance, with the child upon one arm, whilst with the other she made such progress as was possible with her encumbering skirts.

"Throw a rope! Do something!" cried Daisy piteously to Pierre, who seemed only half able to understand her. Even when he at length found one in the rocking, swaying boat, the wind blew it in a contrary direction.

Once Miranda sank, and Daisy, in her agony, thought all was over. But again she struggled to the surface, still grasping the unconscious Paulette. She did not at once perceive the rope in the deepening darkness, and as she drifted at the mercy of the angry, foam-flecked waves, an awful sense of helplessness swept over her. Paulette's

little pale face drooped heavily over her shoulder. Perhaps, after all, she should not save her. Perhaps, after all, their voyage was indeed to have its ending upon an unknown shore. It is often said that drowning persons see the whole of their past life flash by them at the supreme moment, but Miranda only concentrated herself on a frantic effort to cling to the child, to strive her utmost to give her back to Maurice Préval.

When at length she caught the rope it was as much as she could do to hold it, and to let the old sailor drag her into safety. In how few moments it all happened, neither of them ever quite knew. Miranda was unconscious from exhaustion, and saw nothing until she opened her eyes upon one of the tiny electric steamers which had been hastily sent from St. Malo when the horrified loungers on the quay had seen what had happened. Daisy was chafing her hands in an agony of fear, finally giving way to a rapture of relief.

The weak voice sounded strange when Miranda at last spoke questioningly the one word, "Paulette?"

"Safe, dearest. Saved by you."

"Thank God." Her eyes closed again, and



a delicious sense of restful happiness stole over her. Maurice would soon know that she had been able to restore to him that precious little life, and at this sweet thought a faint colour stole into her cheeks.

Children revive so quickly that in a very few moments Paulette herself was able to throw her loving arms about her, and to sob out, amid kisses and tears, "I am so glad not to be drowned, for I am not yet good enough to go to Papa and the saints, or at all tired of being alive. I did not want to die in the dark in the dreadful cold sea, without embracing my doll—and my Uncle Maurice."

Meanwhile a crowd had gathered upon the Dinard side, attracted by a sinister rumour that two ladies had been drowned, which had flown across with incredible rapidity. Old Pierre had left the *Hirondelle* to curtsy to the waves, and landed first of all, in time to inform his eager listeners that he had performed such prodigies of valour that an enthusiast rushed round to make an immediate collection for him, and had secured eight francs in copper before anything like the true version of the story filtered out.

"I am old, but I love well the ladies. To save their lives was but a small matter for an

honourable mariner," he was vaingloriously announcing, when the Cousine Séraphine, who had been in Dinard for the market, and whose temper was not of the best, owing to a glut in pears, observed caustically that men were ever liars and boasters, and that the garments of Pierre were astonishingly dry for one who, on his own showing, had been swimming so far and so long.

It was a proud moment for her when she recognized Miranda in her dripping dress, for she was wearing her grandmother's best shawl, and came forward majestically to proffer the warm wrap, with its fine old embroideries. She had expected to be in her element in the chorus of a tragedy, but it was more imposing to be thus elevated to a speaking part, even though the drama proved less thrilling than an affair involving a grand funeral.

"See you well," she proclaimed as melodramatically as if she were introducing the virtuous *ingénue* at the Porte St. Martin, "it is the gracious young English lady with whom I have the honour to be acquainted who has saved this adorable child, and not that old *coquin* Pierre, incapable of a truthful word, or of anything else but to drink himself stupid."

"The good woman is right," endorsed Paulette shrilly, enjoying her rôle of heroine, even although bundled in a sailor's coat.

Miranda's golden head was bare, for her hat had been swept away, and she put the shawl over her shoulders with a faint word of thanks. She was still feeling giddy and bewildered as she leant upon Daisy's arm. There was an enthusiastic cheer when she came slowly up the landing-place. The excitable crowd was as easily moved to a genuine, chivalrous admiration for her brave action as if it had not been acclaiming Pierre three minutes earlier. Something or somebody as an excuse for even more talking than usual is a French essential to happiness, and here was a fine opportunity not to be wasted.

"*Quel amour d'enfant*," murmured the kindly mothers in white caps. "*Une blonde superbe*," was the masculine verdict upon Miranda, with her ruffled masses of hair and her fine figure, in the soaked and clinging blue serge. She scarcely realized what all this applause meant, but Daisy was flushed with delight and gratitude to every man or woman who cried "*Bravo !*"

The cabman selected felt himself fortunate. They chose him because his carriage was closed, but he made the most of his opportunities by

driving as slowly as possible to Madame Mélan-court's hotel, and conversing with the large escort by which he was followed. The subscribers of the eight francs had, however, remained behind to demand the return of their money and express their candid opinion of the ex-hero so forcibly as to reduce him to maudlin tears.

The Cousine Séraphine had hurried breathless to the tramway in the hope of securing the delicious privilege of being the first to tell the story at St. Briac. News travels quickly in Dinard, and before the cab reached the Hôtel d'Albion, a rapid youth on a bicycle had dashed up to the door and been overheard by Madame Mélan-court to announce that "Ma'mselle Paulette had been drowned." The poor, distracted lady was scarcely able to be reassured by the truth before Fi-Fi and Paulette were in her arms, relating in duet that, "but for Mademoiselle, Paulette would be under the sea."

Every one waiting for dinner in the hall stared at Miranda, and the French onlookers did not try to repress audible expressions of admiration. Her deep content had now given place to English shyness, and a wish to get quietly away and not to be fussed over. At first she could scarcely be



persuaded to stay until she had had some hot soup and assumed a soft white tea-gown belonging to Madame Mélancourt.

Daisy had returned to St. Enogat immediately, lest any alarming report should reach Madame de Verton.

As for Paulette, she insisted upon telephoning herself to St. Briac that she had been nearly drowned, and that Mademoiselle Ricordan had saved her. The answer had been prompt : "I come at once to embrace my darling and lay my thanks at the feet of her preserver."

Miranda had been installed by the bustling proprietor in a rose-papered salon with a bright fire. He joyfully foresaw a sequence of paragraphs dated from the Hôtel d'Albion, and redounding indirectly to the credit of his house. "The niece of our Préval is not drowned every day," he wisely decided, and such a chance of advertisement was not to be neglected.

She had begged Madame Mélancourt to leave her to rest a little whilst she dined, and she did not hear either of the message to St. Briac or of its answer, or guess that a motor was hurrying through the darkness at a pace so reckless that it was well the roads were almost deserted. She

felt very weary, and satisfied to lie still until the carriage came to take her back. She had sprained her left wrist slightly, and they had put it in a sling, but it was not painful enough to be disturbing. She closed her eyes, and a sound, dream-haunted sleep came almost at once as she lay back upon the cushioned couch.

Meanwhile, Préval had reached the hotel, to find it absorbed in the great ceremony of dinner. He hurried upstairs to Paulette, and sat beside her bed, with his arm round her, whilst she poured out the wonderful tale of her deliverance, which lost nothing in the telling. She was so pretty, with her rosy cheeks and tumbled curls above her pink dressing-gown, that he felt how dreary and empty life would have been without her gay presence.

"Thou must thank the saints and make them offerings, my uncle. Even my *bonne* has promised two candles to Notre Dame de Bon Secours," she said solemnly. "And what will be fine enough for you to give the dear Mademoiselle who loved her Paulette so much that she was not afraid of those terrible waves? And thou, too, thou wilt love her well. Is it not true? Go. I desire now to pray and to

take my bouillon. She is in the salon there opposite, refreshing herself before she goes to St. Enogat."

He obediently tapped at the door, which was not quite closed, being protected by a screen. There was no answer, and he knocked again a little louder, with the same result. She had evidently left already. He would go in for a moment, and try to write a few words to express all this passion of gratitude stirring him to the depths of his being.

He entered, to stand quite still and to look intently at the sleeping girl, for there was something higher than mere beauty in the pale face. His quick glance fell upon the sling. She had been hurt, then, this slender creature, in her battle with the sea for the life of a child. He dared not wake her, yet he longed intensely to kiss the ringless hand lying beside her. She had been so brave, and yet she looked all womanly gentleness as she lay there so quietly.

The room was very tranquil, and he lingered, chained by some new and strong emotion. She was dreaming, for she smiled, and presently one whispered word broke the silence: "Maurice." His own name! Yet she was not awake.

He felt startled, as if he had profaned a pure

sanctuary in hearing it, and hurried downstairs and out into the wild night ; but as he sped along the straight white road, with the moaning wind and sea for company, it echoed in his heart and made a delicate music there.



## CHAPTER XIV

### WILD THYME

MIRANDA slept for some time after Maurice Préval's unknown visit. When she was roused by the arrival of Daisy and Madame de Verton, all wonder and emotion, she insisted upon being taken straight to the villa, and avoided a general reception at the main entrance of the Beau Séjour, to the chagrin of Monsieur Rotron, fully prepared for a sensation with a bouquet, a bottle of champagne, and an ornate speech.

Francine shed tears of delight over her safety and celebrity, mingled with a bitter jealousy of the Cousine Séraphine, "ever intrusive," who had so adroitly brought herself into prominence by the help of their grandmother's shawl. It was hard not to have been an eye-witness of the great event, but she made amends for any discrepancy in facts by a bold exuberance of fancy, and kept a large audience of waiters and chamber-

maids riveted till past midnight by her accounts of the adventure.

Miranda herself was tired out, and impatient to be alone. She only wanted one person to thank her for doing her duty, and was half ashamed of herself for the strength of that wish. The noisy French exaggeration of the affair into an occasion for making her a heroine was irksome. To save a child, if possible, was a perfectly natural impulse with every one. That she had obeyed it, with the knowledge that she could swim well, was not very wonderful, and in her humility she felt that perhaps she had not done what was right from an unselfish motive after all.

But if a weary self-examination kept her restless in the darkness, sleep came again when, towards dawn, the rain fell heavily and silenced the sighing wind until it dropped. All her life she remembered the delight of that awakening, when the sun was high in the blue mists of a perfect September day, and evil dreams of a struggle with overmastering waves gave place to a reality of calm beauty and joy in mere existence.

Daisy had hovered about, waiting for her bell to ring, and at its sound came in laden with

sweet peas and those first autumn roses lovelier than all their summer sisters, and followed by Francine with a dainty breakfast. Daisy was the rare thing, a born nurse, at her very best in a sick-room, and now prettily anxious to pet and make much of Miranda with charming little ways that were never tiresome. The women who have this talent are not many, and how precious they are only those they have soothed and comforted realize at all.

Victor de Verton had sent Jules early to the market for the flowers. He, too, had kept his wakeful vigil, and had rejoiced in the coming of this enchanted morning. For he believed that his prayer for his friend was being exquisitely answered. Could Maurice refuse to trust in woman when a girl's hand had given him back his little Paulette? Was not the inspiration of *La Rosée*, as he had said, the renaissance of new faith and hope? He felt stronger, despite his sleeplessness, and he could go out in the sun and meet Miranda in the old place under the tamarisks, now tasselled with shell-pink spires. He would ask her to tell him the truth as to that trivial matter of the *Morning Star*, which had sunk into insignificance now. Would it have at all influenced Préval unless its supposed

writer had assumed some importance in his eyes?

With the roses he sent a brief note of touchingly expressed admiration, asking Miranda to spare him a little time later if it were possible. She had just despatched a ready promise when Francine hurried to the door, to bring back a telegram and an English letter, and not another of the numerous inquiries of which she was so proud.

"Read it, Daisy, as they are waiting for an answer," said Miranda carelessly.

It was very short: "When may I thank you?—Maurice Préval." But the quick Daisy saw with a pang of positive fear that it was not easy for Miranda to reply, and that she hesitated, pencil in hand. Supposing this Frenchman were to fall in love with her and take her away into another world? What had Miranda said at Mont St. Michel? Yet she was half comforted by an assurance—admittedly a hope—that Miranda would never marry and develop interests of her own instead of that unfailing supply of sympathy for those of other people making her so popular.

For Miranda was clever enough to know that if single women wish to have married friends



they are compelled to resign themselves to apparent self-forgetfulness. The most sweet-natured married people are so often apt to narrow down their interests to their own homes. They regard their friends in proportion as they prove good listeners to all that concerns themselves, and would be amazed if it were clearly pointed out to them that the solitary woman's own affairs may seem quite as important to herself. Then, to insular Daisy, Prével was, before all things, a "foreigner," and she had no idea that Miranda judged Frenchmen and Englishmen from exactly the same standpoint.

Meanwhile the brief reply, "This afternoon," was sent, and Miranda turned to the letter before laughingly rejecting the rôle of interesting invalid. Daisy was so anxious to press upon her, and going down to bathe as usual. It was typed and businesslike of aspect, and was signed by Fraser Micklethwaite. The *Morning Star* was to be enlarged, owing to its steady success. There was to be a special literary supplement, and George Everard Stokes was offered a permanent position on its staff upon excellent terms, especially to review and comment upon current French literature. Yet even what would once have been an event of such

paramount importance seemed but a trifle now.

It was difficult indeed to believe that this still water, with only a gilt-edged ripple on its surface, was the same sea, so cold and angry when yesterday the "wild white horses" had tried to ride away with little Paulette.

Now that the meeting for which she had longed in the silent night was so near at hand she almost dreaded it, and was glad that her promise to Victor postponed it for a few hours. She did not want the words of obligatory ceremonious gratitude Préval would speak. She might stand beside him at Le Guildo in dream-land; but in clear, unexciting daylight, reason recalled his cold politeness at the tournament.

When she was dressed, and was deftly arranging a knot of mauve sweet peas to wear, she had to bid a hasty good-bye to Yvonne de la Rivière, leaving unexpectedly for Paris. They kissed in a silence to both of them eloquent with remembrance, and Miranda put some of her roses into the small hand clasping hers so tightly.

The next interruption was a loud knock, all unwelcomely admitting Mrs. Sturge, whose sharp eyes took in every detail of Francine's coquettish

arrangement of the beribboned bouquets and cards which had streamed in from French sources, a hideous motor-car made of stocks, from "Tou-Tou" Deruche, occupying the place of honour. Curiosity had, as usual, conquered any other sentiment, and she had almost forgotten her dislike of Miranda in consenting to assume the always congenial office of inquirer.

She explained suavely that Mr. Fodderby, "the writer of that very clever article in the *Morning Star* about the French novelist out at St. Briac," had returned to St. Enogat very desirous of interviewing her for the *Dinard Times*, and obviously expected Miranda to be as overwhelmed with pleasure as she would herself have been under similar circumstances. For to be prominent was Mrs. Sturge's ever-unrealized ideal. "It will, of course, be such a help to you, with your writing, to have every one reading about you, and Mr. Fodderby is so very up-to-date in all his methods," was her complacent conclusion.

She was unprepared for Miranda's point-blank refusal, and for the decision with which she explained that all personalities in journalism were odious to her. "Some one," she ended, "apparently told certain of my acquaintances that I was

the writer of the article you call clever, and I consider impudent and stupid. I shall be grateful if you will contradict any such report if you can guess from whom it emanated. My own work upon the *Morning Star* is always signed, and deals with literary matters alone. You were good enough to promise not to mention my unimportant pseudonym. I absolve you from that promise that you may explain that I have nothing to do with 'up-to-date methods,' and have no desire to deprive Mr. Fodderby of his admirers under false pretences."

Mrs. Sturge felt distinctly uncomfortable, but the recollection that she had seen Victor de Verton being wheeled to his favourite sheltered corner sent her away with but a hasty word of regret as to the interview, instead of the cutting retort uncourteous she would have liked to make had one such opportunely occurred to her. She therefore hastened to his side, and breathlessly informed him of her mistake as to the authorship of the article.

"You will recall, Madame, that I, at least, was not mistaken. I am privileged to know Miss Ricordan too well," he had said, forgetting the momentary doubt in her which had led him to show the paper to Préval.



Poor Mrs. Sturge went back to Mrs. Medlicott and the complacent Fodderby to give a rather inaccurate account of what had taken place, and find what comfort she might in accompanying them to a fête on the beach at Dinard, which, together with the waning season, made the Beau Séjour look deserted.

Miranda induced Daisy to go with Madame de Verton to see Paulette, telling them that she wished to take care of Victor and to rest that morning. He had dismissed his servant, and was reading when she came towards him, wearing the fragrant flowers he had sent to her. His letter had filled her with self-reproach that for a little while she had quite forgotten this unselfish devotion, asking nothing in return. For Yvonne de la Rivière had been a true prophet. Her turn had indeed come quickly.

In the golden sunshine the change in Victor was more than ever piteous. His face looked aged and lined, and all the life seemed centred in the eyes looking up appealingly into her own. She understood the "great mystery" now, and, with an impulse she did not try to fathom, with a pity altogether too tender for words, she bent down, in her health and strength and happiness, and gently kissed him upon the forehead. Nothing

surprises when death is near, and to Victor this un hoped-for, unimagined kiss came as a foretaste of Paradise itself. He knew now that Miranda had never shrunk from him, never been painfully affected by the deformed body soon to be thrown aside like a worn-out garment. It laid at rest for ever the old longing to be as other men were. For to his cross he owed this crown. Not Maurice Préval, with all his laurels, had received such a sweet gift as this.

Frenchman and poet, he knew how to thank her, and for a peaceful hour it seemed as if summer had come back. She read a little, and they talked for a long while. He spoke of the *Morning Star*, but all that now seemed to Miranda a distant and small matter. Yesterday she had herself been hurried for an instant near the dim valley of death's shadow encompassing him, and that experience gave her power to understand vast horizons of thought never before approached. The single kiss might have been a wonder-working charm to destroy the barrier keeping souls apart. Only when Maurice was named was there anything to bar the freedom of this perfect intercourse.

"You have seen him?" asked Victor.

"Not yet," answered Miranda, believing she

spoke the truth. "He telegraphed, and is coming this afternoon. I wish he had not troubled. I suppose he will drive over in his motor about four o'clock, as I think you said he worked in the mornings. But he is sure to come first to see you."

The loud clang of the lunch-bell made its customary clamorous interruption, and Victor held out his hand to clasp hers. "This has been the supreme hour of my life. Let me wish you all the happiness you have given me. I want you to keep this book as a little token of gratitude from one to whom Paulette is very dear."

The tears rose to her eyes as she took the shabby volume in silence. For it was *Pervenches*, and she knew it was a sign that their final parting was near at hand.

"Maurice will be lonely when I am gone," he continued. "Comfort him a little for my sake."

The thought of the noisy *table d'hôte* was altogether too incongruous with her mood; and as, to her relief, Daisy and Madame de Verton had not returned, she could wander away alone upon that cliff pathway to St. Lunaire, where to-day there was solitude in the soft September sunshine, amid a ripening feast of blackberries.

She sat down upon the short, thyme-scented

turf, gazing idly out at the broad prospect of a sea asleep in the September calm. "Peacocks" and "Painted Ladies" fluttered over the lilac scabious blossoms. They recked nothing of nearing winter, and she, too, would carelessly enjoy the radiant present, and thrust from her the thought that in a few days she would be back in England. She could have no pretext for lingering on, or for frustrating Daisy's project to be at home a few days before her husband, to begin a new era as a model housekeeper. Daisy was impatient. She talked much of Archie and the babies, and her near delight in seeing them again. Absence—and Herapath—had taught her lessons worth learning, she would be wiser, and not sadder, in the future.

Meanwhile, the recurrent picture of Prével quietly at work was very far from the reality, for he was haunted by that one softly spoken, mysterious word—a problem with no solution—and did not even try to write. He had eagerly awaited the answer to his telegram, to be keenly disappointed when it came. Yet, after all, why should she be in any haste to receive the thanks of one who at their last meeting had shown himself only deserving of the coldest indifference?

Restless and dissatisfied, he took his canoe



and landed upon that tiny island where he had first seen Miranda fastening up her golden hair. The song she had sung seemed to break the silence now, and to ring out clearly above the sound of the undercurrent of wavelets just plashing on the shell-strewn beach :—

“ Sur le rivage aride et solitaire,  
C'était un jour un jeune et beau pêcheur.”

It seemed to point harshly to a difference in their years. Was there, perhaps, some young lover in her heart? Yet, dreaming, she had called him, and he had come. Beside his vision of her pale, pure sleeping face, his wayward past looked stained and spotted. Had he not said a thousand times that women were all alike, trivial and false? How could he thank her who had disproved his words by risking her own life for the life of a child? “Maurice.” It would be good, he thought, to hear his name spoken once again with that soft inflection.

What did her song say? “Viens, partagez le bonheur!” No thought of those *bonnes fortunes*, offered to him again and again in Paris, had ever affected the stern lowliness of his estimate of himself. The woman he had loved with the first boyish passion had fooled him after all his

patient years of waiting. From that hard fact he had deduced an illogical certainty that he was not of those fortunate ones capable of inspiring faithful love, even supposing it ever existed. He was a literary fashion—nothing more. That a yet harsher fate had befallen his brother accentuated the sting. Alone in his little boat, the fruits of his fame once more seemed Dead Sea apples, as upon that July morning, and the warm precincts of some safe harbour of human affection more alluring than the success which had proved, after all, so poor a disappointment.

He would go early and see Victor. And then, with a sudden dislike for the noise and dust of his motor-car, he decided to walk to St. Lunaire, and thence over the cliff path to St. Enogat. Every step of the path was peopled with old dreams of his youth ; for, though Paris claimed him, he never forgot he was Breton.

Thus it befell that, when he turned a sharp corner, he came all unawares upon Miranda, sitting alone among the golden rods and butterflies. All her shyness vanished strangely as he greeted her. It was the great novelist, the cynic, the admired of all Paris, who was almost awkward in her presence. She had expected cold, ceremonious thanks, not these few fervent

words of praise, filling her with a sense of her own unworthiness. Fate had been kind to give her that precious opportunity of doing this one service for his sake. That thought gave her the courage she would never have had could she have known of the last meeting, ever present in his mind. It seemed so natural to talk together of Paulette, but presently Miranda spoke of herself, and even to his fastidious ear her French was music.

"I believe, Monsieur Préval" ("Ah, if she would but once again say 'Maurice,'" he thought inconsequently), "that you read and disliked a foolish account of yourself in an English newspaper; also that you did me the honour to imagine I had written it. That honour belongs to Mr. Fodderby, a journalist of no importance."

"If I was fool enough so to misunderstand you, can I ever hope for forgiveness?"

Miranda's honest grey eyes met his frankly, but dropped before those that met them eagerly, supplicatingly.

"It is quite true that it pained me," she said simply, "because I really am a writer in a very humble way—just an under-gardener in the Eden of literature. But I have loved my work there, and have at least kept my pen clean from

vulgar personalities. The world knows how you despise writing women, but I have found good comrades among them, and for them, as well as for myself, I hated to be so misjudged."

With a deep respect he raised her right hand to his lips and kissed it. "For the sake of this brave hand that held my little Paulette so safely, let me unsay all I said in my ignorance. And you will graciously tell me the names of your books, and let me learn something of goodness from them."

He tried to end lightly, but it was Miranda's turn to be serious. "There are no books; there never will be now," she said wistfully. "Even a few weeks ago I had ambition enough to think I might create one story. But something has killed it—perhaps the perfection of *Perfides*, at once so merciless and so true. When I was Alice for a moment, you made me understand how you regarded us. It was unfair. We are so feeble, and you so strong. Who would believe in us against your testimony?"

Again his blue, deep-set eyes met hers with that look of incomprehensible entreaty. "You say you have written no story. What of *La Rosée*?" he asked impetuously.

She was silent, failing to grasp his meaning.



"*La Rosée* is yours as truly as if you had written every word. The inspiration flew to me on the light wings of your song. You took me back to fairyland, and I find it here again upon 'a bank whereon the wild thyme blows.'" For the first time he spoke in perfect English, and the sound struck a note of new intimacy between them.

"Let me stay a little while," he petitioned, after a pause full of eloquence; and, although she did not answer him, he seated himself bare-headed at her feet, crushing the dull lavender-pink flowers until they gave out a yet stronger perfume.

There is a golden hour when Love is weaving the threefold cord not swiftly to be broken, and those into whose lives it comes never forget its honey-sweetness. To Préval, stifled with scented boudoirs, weary of the pretence of half-lights and the stale intricacies of simulated love in idleness, their difference from this wholesome wind-swept cliff added to the charm. He watched Miranda with a sense of reverence for the contrast she offered to those painted, powdered women he had used as so many lay-figures for the purposes of his art. Her English freedom from self-consciousness seemed

to him a beautiful innocence. He would not have dared to remain but for that memorable word of last night. Some day he might tell her all, but not yet, or the pride he so admired would be up in arms against him.

There seemed so much to say, and one question at last forced itself to his lips as the sun went slowly down, flooding them with a rose-coloured glory. "How much longer shall you be in France?"

It brought her sharply back to reality. "Ten days. And I must go back now. You will not come, for it is getting very late." And he understood.

"Your word is my command," he said gently. "But to-morrow—and all those other days—you will not forbid me?"

The fading sweet peas fell at his feet, and he forgot himself, like any other lover, and stooped to make them his own. Miranda took them from him with entire simplicity. "They came from Monsieur Victor," she explained, replacing them in her dress, and shyly evading his question.

Looking into her eyes, he said "Good-bye" in English, as if she had fully answered it.

"It will seem long to me until to-morrow," he began again.

But she gave him back the French "Adieu," so rich in meaning, before she went quickly away to face Daisy's questionings, and a Paulette a little injured because her uncle had not arrived.

She took the child upon her lap, and whispered, "Do not be vexed, *bijou*. He came but to tell me how glad he was that you were safe, and soon he will certainly come again."

## CHAPTER XV

### THE SILVER PEN

**I**F Maurice Préval, like a man, took the friend now imprisoned in his darkened room into full confidence, Miranda, like the best women—though this is never believed—made no confidences at all. He came and went with a complete carelessness as to what might be said or thought concerning him, letting his secret be guessed by the least curious, whilst she was so quiet and reserved that no one could be sure how it would all end.

Yet within three days Francine and Jules talked more than ever of the little shop at Arles, and the Cousine Séraphine, who had picked a quarrel with the housekeeper at Villa Joyeuse, had asserted tauntingly that "*son Monsieur à elle*" would have a fine lady next summer, who would buy fruits at their just prices from deserving persons like herself, instead of keeping a cook who was a veritable skinflint.



Madame de Verton, with the comfortable assurance that Yvonne was safely trying on riding habits in Paris, could be as sentimental as any one, and was, indeed, romantic, unless romance bid fair to affect the pecuniary advantage of any member of her own family.

"It is evident that our *cher* Prével at last thinks of ranging himself," she confided to Daisy. "He has been much in England, and makes his court after that strange manner of which I have read as the custom of your country. But Mademoiselle Ricordan is of a discretion and grace enchanting; she conceals well her sentiments. Perhaps for her it may be but one of those friendships which we in France only experience when we are married. They are dangerous, is it not so? It is safer to have first the husband."

But Daisy could say nothing, even had she wished to do so. She could only extol Miranda, and try to feel unselfish.

Paulette, as might have been expected, rose to the occasion, for her nurse and the nurse of Fi-Fi had their own views upon the subject. "The Uncle Maurice follows my counsels," she informed Madame de Verton complacently. "I told him he must love Mademoiselle well for

saving Paulette, and one can see he obeys. Do not speak of this, you say ! Ah, bah ! Camille has heard, and all of Dinard that is left will hear too. She is *bavarde* beyond all belief. For me, I await events. I am quite ready for a new aunt, when it is one who comprehends that I am no longer a child ; and at a wedding, if one does not greatly amuse one's self, there remains always the toilettes to observe."

As for Mrs. Medlicott and Mrs. Sturge, they were so anxious Miranda should be disappointed that they informed all their intimates that "this foreigner was really behaving disgracefully," and almost ended by believing it.

But Dot Scott-Battersby, in all the disorder of departure, spoke her mind to Mrs. Sturge. "The man's in dead earnest, and he'll be lucky if he gets her. She's the best sort. You've never been good-lookin', and I've never been clever, and she's both ; but that's no reason why we should be cats. Mrs. Medlicott won't get that daughter of hers off any quicker by interferin' with other folks' affairs."

"Quite a valuable bit of possible copy," commented Fodderby, who was an unwholesome-looking person, with nothing full-sized about

him except his private opinion of his own abilities.

So they all had their say ; but, fortunately, when two people are gravitating insensibly towards their supreme goal, their oblivion to outsiders becomes almost ludicrous. To their sublimated selfishness nothing matters not having immediate concern with those unique feelings. They know that "the light that never was on land or sea" does yet transfigure an existence where every minute has its precious history.

Late upon the night of their meeting on the cliff Maurice Prével's first letter had been brought to Miranda by a messenger. If the curious literary world could have peered into it with profane glances, there might well have been a complaint that he had never given of his best until now.

As to Miranda, she answered him all forgetful of the great author, only remembering the blue eyes for ever seeking hers, the light flashing into them when they met. She had so often dreamt of the day when she would begin the first chapter of her own romance. She wrote it now, whilst the moon glittered above a pathway of pure silver, with a beauty of which she had no idea. She had thought but to give what lay

within her to an unknown public by the thorny way of criticism and indifference. Instead her happier fate called her to pour out her thoughts to one reader alone, in an exquisite assurance of complete understanding.

She wrote in English, and at last there came a line or two written in her own language. Préval asked if she would meet him on the beach at St. Briac. "I am obliged to ask it, though it is I who should come to you ; for at St. Enogat we can never be alone." She could not reply. The words would not come, and Daisy, entering, found her with a blank sheet of paper before her.

Then, under cover of the friendly twilight, Miranda spoke under her breath : "To-morrow I am going early to St. Briac. I can trust you to let no one know."

Daisy had stolen away in comprehending silence, and no one saw Miranda get into the clumsy tram seeming more than ever unsuitably mated with the lovely landscape, now partly lit by the red fires of autumn. As she passed up the village she had stretched out her hand to gather a spray of traveller's joy, the flower tangled with memories of Le Guildo, dearer to her than any garden blossom.



She got out just where the great gaunt hotel, already closed, showed its blank, unregarding windows to the sea, and saw Prével standing alone upon the beach. For a moment she watched the tall figure sharply silhouetted against the cloudless sky, and a chill of doubt swept over her. Who was she, that he could care for her? And if he really cared, should she dare to leave friends and country for him? Supposing his were but an idle summer fancy, what charm had she to hold him faithful? Misgivings thronged about her, each with some anxious message. What of the brilliant man of the world, taking the natural place won by himself in a Paris seeming to her almost terrible because so unknown?

Perhaps she had been wrong in coming, wrong in replying to those letters which had enchanted her beyond all conventionalities. He read women so sternly, so critically. Might he not judge her harshly for having so departed from her calm government of her own actions? Then, her likeness to the picture of Alice was surely another obstacle between them. How it had repelled him when they had danced together to the mad Hungarian music! There might come again a time when even that resemblance

would have its potency against her. She had pleaded with Fraser Micklethwaite not to appraise her only by her best, and here she was only conscious of the dread of being misunderstood which even this wonderful week had not yet banished.

At the sound of her footsteps he turned and hastened towards her, bringing a swift sense of complete confidence, and she did not any longer ask her heart what he might say or she might answer. For him, for days past he had thought out all the details of their interview, yet always with an ever-present fear that she could never trust him enough to come to this one place where he could tell her all. It might only have been hope's flattery that this girl, in her goodness and her youth, could stoop down to surrender herself to him. Her letters, lying now near his heart, might only have been written for friendship's sake. If she had been French he would have known ; but this English fearless innocence, that was yet not ignorance, had deeper meaning.

When he had murmured his thanks to her for her presence, he had meant to say so much ; but when he saw her pale as her white dress, he was overcome by the delicious certainty that

here stood the one woman able to round his life into full completeness. He caught her hand with just the plain three words that tell the old, old story : "I love you." He spoke in English, as if he would fain be English for her dear sake ; and she, as eager to be French for his, made her low answer : "*Je vous aime.*"

He clasped her in his arms for a long moment, with no witness but the sea, uttering eternal harmonies unheeded.

"Call me by my name," he pleaded. "Tell me—but no ; it is impossible. I cannot be the first."

"Maurice, one other man has loved me, but I was only surprised and very sorry. My first kiss I gave to another—to Victor. You do not grudge it ?"

"Not even that to him. I only love you more for your divine pity. But you—you can trust me ? You ask nothing ?"

She smiled. "I am not afraid. My own past is dead to me now. Why should not yours be ? Only tell me the one thing, when did you first think of me ?"

"Look at the little island over there. Once upon a time a weary, disillusioned man passed by it in a boat. There he saw a golden-locked

mermaid, who sang, 'Viens, partagez le bonheur.' But he was deaf at first; the noises of the world were in his ears. Then, when Titania slept, her lullaby bade me awaken, and I could not but obey. But I think I only really knew when for a moment I stood beside you while you slept, the night you saved Paulette. Then you spoke one word. You called me by my name, and I answered. That word has haunted me ever since."

"Maurice, Maurice, it was for you I saved her. I am sure now that love came when I first saw you in the church, even before I prayed for you at Mont St. Michel. Only I too struggled. I wanted still to be free, and I hated those books you had written. It was Victor who taught me what you really were, in his loyalty to you. Once I was angry with a man who seemed to want to marry me because he thought he read my character between the lines I wrote. Yet I myself was utterly unjust to you because of *Perfides*. Oh, it is all a mistake. Art is art, and life is life. They must be more or less apart. See, Maurice, what I will do for you," and as she spoke she hurriedly took a little silver pen from the chatelaine she wore, and threw it into the sea.



But it fell just at the water's edge, and he caught it up again, all wet and sparkling in the flashing sunshine. "‘La plume loyale vaut l'épée sans tache,’ and I could not accept that sacrifice. Use it, Miranda, if inspiration speaks. There would otherwise come a day when you might long for the old love when the new lover had shown himself to be but the man he is. See, I give it back. Je ne crains point mon rival."

She looked up at him tenderly as she held it, and rejoiced in that first act of obedience. What was independence to her now, if she had found love for her master and her teacher?

"It is good for me that you are so alone," he said, "for there will be no need to wait if you are sure; only say it once again."

"Maurice, je vous aime. My life is in your hands. But I do not want fame now. I shall have your laurels, and there are so many—enough for me to be well content."

"We will not shiver in the north, *ma reine*," he said presently. "We love the sea and the sunshine, and we will have flowers about us, and scents of lavender and rosemary. If I fetch you in October, we will go south with the swallows, and find some place where we can be together

alone. I am so tired of Paris. Shall it be Rome, where a ragged pilgrim once put a bit of silver he could scarcely spare into the waters of Trevi to ensure return? Or Genoa, in a marble palace, because in that city of palaces there are no meaner lodgings?"

"No; let us stay in France," begged Miranda, dwelling upon the name of her new country as upon that of some dear friend. "I want to speak your language and to be among your people. I fell in love with your Bretagne before I knew it was yours."

"And when summer comes again you will take me back to England, and we will make a garland of fairy tales in Shakespeare land itself, where I found the dewdrops," he interposed.

Together thus on the white beach they built their castles in the air like two children, heedless of time. It was Miranda who first said, "Let us go back. We ought at least to tell Victor. Ah, Maurice, he pleaded your cause so often to me, never knowing that it was won so long ago."

"It is too soon," he whispered passionately, taking her in his arms again.

For an instant she lay there unresisting; then

she spoke. "He is very, very ill. Do not let us leave him too long."

"But we must go by the cliff path from St. Lunaire," he urged, thinking of its solitude and its wild thyme, and to this she could make no demur.

"Victor talked so much to me of you. He has helped me to find my Paradise," said Maurice as they went. "He is very near his own Heaven now."

Miranda's eyes were bright with tears. Even here, in the heart of the "great mystery," that piteous plaint, "*Je ne suis pas un homme*," sounded like a knell. Then she remembered how soon it would have another, grander significance. He who had been a martyr so long would wither and agonize no longer. He, too, had loved her so well that he had used all his influence, all the tenderness of his utter unselfishness, to give her Maurice. Not even to-day would she desert him.

The miles seemed very short, and all too soon they reached St. Enogat again. The narrow village street was crowded, and by the high white Calvary towering against the fleckless blue there were groups of women kneeling in prayer. The church door was wide open, and a priest in

vestments, with scarlet-cassocked acolytes and lighted candles, faint and dim in the sunshine, bore the supreme sacrament of love and pity to one in extreme need. Then Miranda knew. She hardly needed to question a black-coifed young widow rising up from her prayers, rosary in hand, after the procession had passed slowly by.

"It is the little Monsieur who is dying," she said brokenly. "There is not one who does not sorrow for him. If ever a saint was too holy for the petitions of sinners, he is that one. He helped us all, and the poorest prized his pity more than his gifts. I pray now that he will recall me in the hour of my death, when he himself stands with the martyrs, for surely his Purgatory has been here in life."

"Go to him, Maurice." Miranda spoke very calmly.

"There must be a Heaven, after all, if you and he believe in it," he said, as he turned away with one long look at her.

Miranda, with her new-born joy solemnized into something higher and more spiritual, bent her steps to her familiar room. She was met on the staircase by Francine, who, with many expressions of grief, told her how Victor had



suddenly become much worse in the night, and how he had sent for Paulette to say farewell, and that the child was inconsolable, and had insisted upon waiting for her own return.

Sitting in the stillness, with Paulette in her arms, they comforted each other almost in silence for a long time.

"Did he never ask for me?" questioned Miranda anxiously.

"No; he said he had made his adieu to you, and when one told that you were at St. Briac he smiled and looked all happy. But he said twice, 'Maurice will not be too late,' and even now my uncle is there with him. He told me we should be quite sure to see each other again, and that he would only say *au revoir*. But I—I am not sure. It was for that I wanted you. You can tell me if St. Michel thought me too *méchante* to listen to me. Yet I gave him my gold heart. Perhaps I had better have asked the little Jésus, who was a child as I am, instead of the great Prince de la Milice Céleste."

But, as Paulette spoke, a white blind was drawn slowly over the window both were watching.

"Darling, your prayer *is* answered. Victor is

quite well again. He will never suffer any more."

It strengthened her love for Maurice that after a while he went back to St. Briac to mourn the friend of all his life in solitude, for to that friendship something was due in which she could not wholly claim a share. But first he told her that Victor had passed away in perfect, painless consciousness, and had rejoiced to know that they two were one.

"I confessed that I had forgotten even him beside you, and that it was you who brought me back in time to say farewell, and to be spared an everlasting remorse because I was too late. You were so dear to him that my forgetfulness was nothing beside your remembrance. Do you see what I shall owe to my wife? The sacred hand-clasp, the blessing of which I was all unworthy. I said to-day that there must be a Heaven if you and he believed it, and now his death has taught me to be sure. If there were indeed no future, how could he have endured? That courage he needed every instant to bear the pangs of physical anguish, the worse pain of the sensitive, beauty-loving soul, where did it come from if not from a strong God?"

When he left her, moved by his grief, and the exquisite nearer intimacy born of sharing it, she felt that she, too, owed something to the other unspoken love of which only now she saw the full meaning. She asked to be allowed to pass alone into the death chamber when a sky full of stars shone serenely above it. Loving hands had set all in order, and so disposed the heavy white draperies upon the bed that it revealed nothing of the grievous distorted outline of the still form. The clear-cut face had a strange new look of youth it had never worn before. There seemed a smile upon the lips that no longer needed any compassionate kiss from hers. There were green palm branches among the tall white lilies round him, for his was the triumph of a martyr faithful unto death.

"On the earth the broken arcs; in the heaven, a perfect round," thought Miranda. After all, what little things were the conquests of earth, compared with such a victory as this. The grateful tears and prayers of the poor had gone up to the white throne sweeter than incense, and made intercession for him that the end should be a holy calm. Deformed, grotesque, tortured through years of patience, the reward had come at last. Victor indeed now! As he lay there

with that changed aspect he had no more need for her pity. Never again. Perhaps, as she stood beside him, he watched her from some glorious region of eternal rest and joy, and pitied her because she had not yet attained.



## AFTERWARDS

ON a fresh morning late in September the editor of the *Morning Star* sat in his office well satisfied. The paper had succeeded beyond his hopes, and election after election was being won for the party for which he worked wholeheartedly. He felt he had a steadily growing influence, and his alert mind was full of ambitious projects. The sudden popularity of the entente cordiale between France and England opened up a fresh vista of useful opportunities. His own affairs had faded away into the background. He might love Miranda, but he could do without her because he had literally no time to think of her.

Yet not quite without a pang of keen regret, as he knew when he read a sheet of copy handed to him by his secretary.

"You said that nothing sent by Mr. Fodderby was to be used, but I think you would wish to see this."

Micklethwaite took the paper and read its headlines with his accustomed impassive face. "An Entente Cordiale Indeed. Romantic forthcoming wedding between the most famous living French novelist, Maurice Prével, and the brilliant young English journalist known as George Everard Stokes." There were vulgar details, feeble wit, and cumbrous bits of over-adjectived description. It was drawn out to a full column, helped by a few time-honoured misquotations.

"Put this rubbish in the waste-paper basket, and give me any letters marked 'Private,'" he said quickly. There were several, but it was one postmarked St. Enogat he read first. It was very short. Merely a grateful refusal of the appointment he had offered, with cordial thanks for all his past help, and the brief confirmation of the news of her marriage. Micklethwaite wrote half a dozen lines quickly. He could still do something for her, it seemed, by saving her, at any rate in this place where she had been familiar, from this insufferable phase of modern journalism.

"Take this downstairs for press," he continued. But when the door was shut, his face softened. "Good-bye, George," he thought, as he burnt the letter in the flaring gas. "She was

always so afraid I judged her only by her work, and placed her on too high a pedestal, and then proceeded to express her scorn of this very man for the defects in his. Now she gives him herself. It is altogether beyond me. Politics are safer than women, after all."

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